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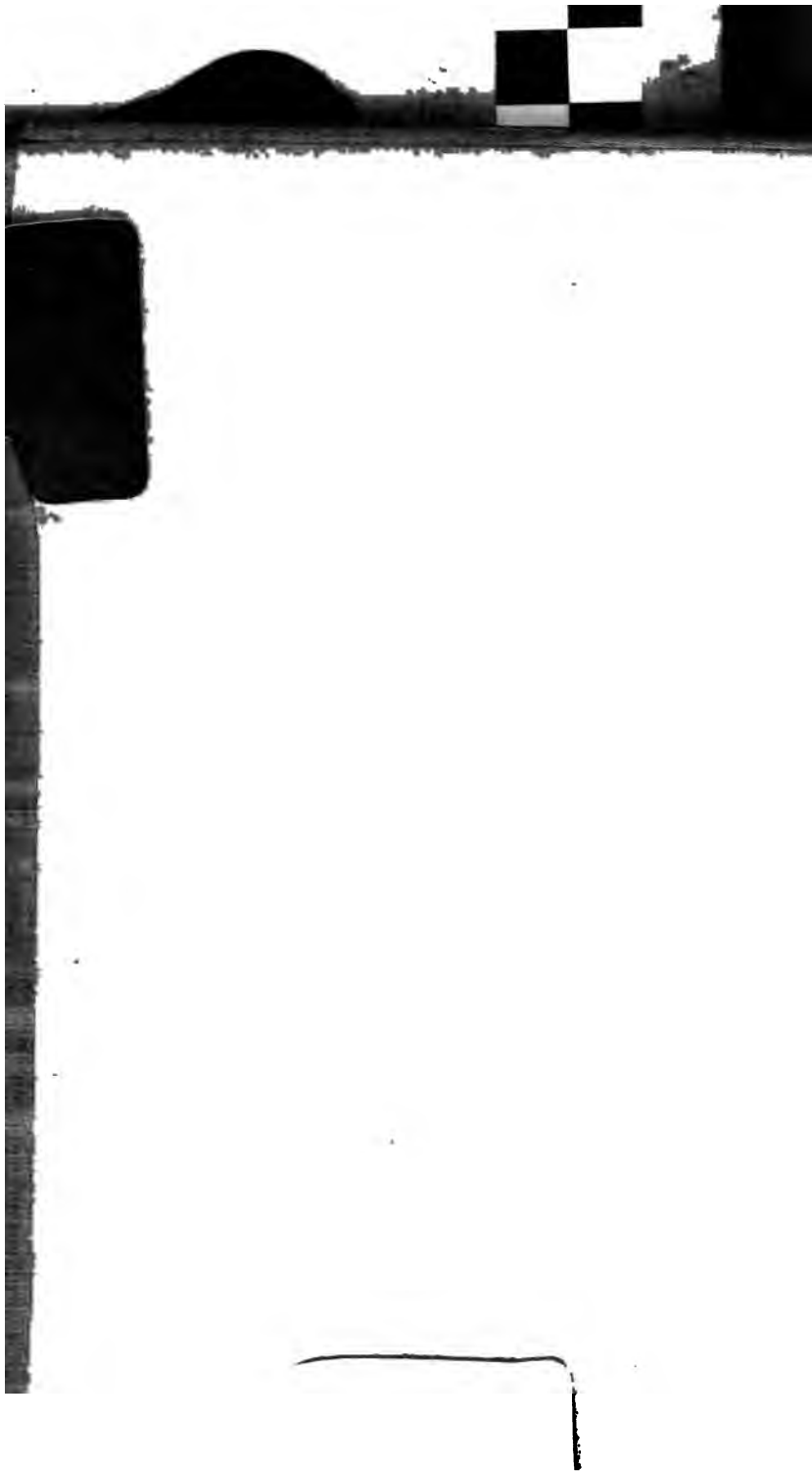
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ELECTA







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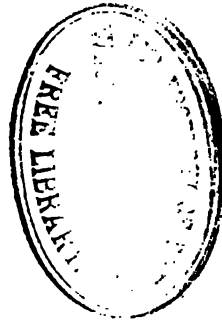
BRADLEY AND WOODRUFF, PUBLISHERS,
BOSTON.

ELECTA.



Conklin Mrs BY J M Drinkwater
MISS JENNIE M^{rio} DRINKWATER.

*"I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that
Thou shouldst keep them from the evil."—ST. JOHN xvii. 15.*



BOSTON:
BRADLEY AND WOODRUFF.

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Dedicated
to
MATTIE AND ANNA.





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ELECTA.

I.

INSIDE OF HERSELF.

"Are Indians good?"

Electa did not hear, or if she heard, she did not listen.

"*Are* Indians good?"

She raised her eyes absent-mindedly, smiled at her little brother, and fell to reading again.

"Are they, 'Lecta?" he asked patiently, rising from his knees and crawling through the short grass to her side.

"Yes, sometimes,—some are."

He arose to his knees and leaning against her shoulder twined both arms in a choking embrace about her neck.

"Was Powhatan good and Captain John Smith?"

"Captain John Smith wasn't an Indian," she replied, laughing and loosening the clasp of the warm, wet, soiled fingers. She lifted her head to kiss the dirty chin—there was a savor of strawberries about the chin and lips that she kissed.

Vail was as sweet as a strawberry any time to his sister.

"Did you ever see any body that was killed by a snake?" he inquired, pulling her hat off and tumbling her hair.

"No, never," she answered with laughing vehemence, dropping into her book again. The book was bound in leather, yellowed with age, and the stained fly-leaf bore her grandfather's name: John Vail Given. Vail called it his book.

"Did you ever tell a lie?" he proceeded after a pause of a second.

But Electa, although she heard, did not care to listen.

"Lecta, did you ever?" with a tightening of the caressing arms.

"Yes," she whispered softly.

"Many times?"

"Not very many."

"Since you've been grown up?"

She hesitated. "Yes, once. I was timid and concealed something that I did."

"What did you do?"

"It wasn't much of any thing, but I was ashamed of it."

"I mean what did you do about the lie?"

Vail had been taught to call a lie a lie, and not a fib or a story; he had been taught to give a lie the name that God gives it.

Electa hesitated again; it was difficult to speak of herself even to her little brother.

"I asked God to forgive me and make me brave enough to always speak the truth."

"So do I; but He don't seem to," the little fellow answered mournfully.

"No, He don't seem to," she answered to her self. "He don't *seem* to think about me or to care any thing about me."

Vail played with her two long light braids and thought a moment. Electa was the odd one among the twelve, the only one with blue eyes and light hair; this distinction, with her name, was her inheritance from her grandmother.

"Has every body in the world but God told a lie?"

"Every body. I suppose," she said, the thought running along with the thought that she was reading.

"Why *can't* God tell a lie?"

"Because He can't; He's too good."

"But can't He if He wants to?" he persisted.

"He can't want to."

"Why can't He want to? Do you know why He can't want to?" insisted the perplexed little reasoner.

Electa raised her eyes and looked off towards the hills. Did she know why God could not want to tell a lie?

Suddenly a light shone into her eyes; she closed the old volume and folded her hands upon it, as her father folded his hands over the Bible in church in the closing prayer, speaking reverently.

for had not God just revealed to her something about Himself, something that had never been given to her before?

"Could you *hurt* mamma, Vail? Could you be so angry with her that you could take an axe and kill her dead?"

"I couldn't, I couldn't—you know I *couldn't*."

"Why couldn't you?"

"Because I love her so."

"And that's just why God *can't* tell a lie! He loves the truth just the way you love mamma, so much, so very much that He can't kill it by telling a lie. If God could tell a lie He'd kill the truth; there wouldn't be any more truth—the truth would be dead. He loves the truth with all His heart and might and strength, just as dearly as you love mamma. And He wants us to love the truth just as much as He does. When we tell a lie it breaks His heart, just as it would break your heart if you should see somebody take an axe and strike mamma."

"I'd kill any body that hurt mamma," cried Vail in a loud voice.

"God does not kill us, because He loves us so, and He wants to save us to teach us how to always speak the truth. But every lie makes His loving heart ache; it makes it ache because He loves the truth and because He loves us. If I should hurt mamma, you wouldn't want to kill me, because you love us both; and so God loves the truth and He loves us. He loves us so much

that He will punish us if we tell a lie. Oh, how God hates a lie!"

Electa's eyes were full; so were the eyes that were hidden on her shoulder. That very morning Vail had told his father a lie about something that he had done. He had told the lie to papa because he was afraid of him. Vail was not the only one in the household afraid of gentle, stern papa. The dark, shorn head kept its place upon her shoulder for a long, sorrowful minute, then he lifted it, caressing her with his hands, his lips, and the top of his head,—he had six sisters to caress,—and then walked slowly away. He did not often move quickly; he was not strong; he and Electa were the only ones not strong among the twelve; if the girls had not been thoughtful and tender-hearted, their laughing, noisy life would have been a little troublesome to Electa, and if the boys had not been thoughtful and tender-hearted, their lusty, vigorous, pushing life would have been very hard for Vail.

People said that it was another of the strange things about the Givens that the boys were as thoughtful as the girls.

Papa and mamma did not think it strange, for why should they not be? Did not the Spirit of Christ reveal itself as thoughtfully in boy nature as in girl nature?

Vail loitered and lingered down the overgrown path to the gate; Electa did not re-open her book, she looked after Vail, and sat thinking. Her blue

gingham skirt covered both shoes as she sat there in the grass. She had a way of glancing down nervously to see if her feet were hidden; the pretty kid boots were not alike, one was small and prettily shaped—as small and slight and pretty as any other girl's boot; the other was larger, with a deeper heel and even with this heel she could not step as lightly and gracefully as the other girls did; she could walk more easily with her hand upon Trude's shoulder or with Celia's arm about her.

This lameness was one of her trials; another trial, almost as hard, in a different fashion, was the usual exclamation, "What a family!" It had been hard enough when it was, "Nine? What a family!" "Eleven? What a family!" had been mortification itself, but "Twelve? What a family!" had been too much to bear. At first, until baby was six months old, she had not borne it at all.

She could not explain even to herself why the exclamation so sure to come had stung her to the quick; papa was happy over it, and Celia and Mollie never seemed to care, but to her it was terrible to be singled out as "What a family!" Papa repeated it sometimes with such a wondering and loving intonation that she was comforted. Perhaps the Lord said it in that voice, too, and if He did, she ought not to care for people's tones. She ought not to care, but she did!

There were thirteen children in Grandma Given's family; what would she do if people ever should

say: "Thirteen? What a family!" Then more than ever would she be the one too many; she would even feel herself to be two too many.

This deep, shady, front yard, enclosed with an unpainted picket fence, was Electa's green temple. It was nothing beside a commonplace front yard, green with long grass and weeds, and shaded with many trees,—locust, evergreen, and maple,—a damp, unwholesome place excepting in spots where the sunshine broke through; suggestive of malaria, especially as the brook ran through it; simply this and nothing beside to the butcher, the baker, the tin peddler, the doctor, the schoolmaster, and all other practical people who glanced in at it through the pickets or took a long look over the fence; but to Electa, who held the baby there on a knoll in a sunshiny spot, or sung him to sleep in the shade, to Electa, who studied there, and read there, and wrote her journal there, shed her infrequent tears there and prayed her frequent prayers there, who dreamed dreams awake and asleep there, it was a temple, a palace, a sanctuary, a playroom, a schoolroom, a retreat when she was weary of the world and longed to be shut up in a convent, a Protestant convent, of course; for the girl lived an intense life, more intense than father and mother ever guessed; when she was angry no one in the house was ever so angry, excepting papa, and through the long years he had learned self-control; when she was happy, she was wild with happiness; and when she was discouraged

and sorrowful, she was discouraged and sorrowful with all her might.

"Don't be moody, child," papa often said; papa, who had been born with all her moods, and, through knowledge, by grace had outgrown them; but Electa had not his knowledge, therefore how could she have his grace? If papa had not been the happiest man in the world, he would have been the most miserable. At seventeen it was a question, whether the daughter so like him would become the happiest or the most miserable woman in the world. To papa it was not a question; there could not be any question about it, because God held the ordering. Electa thought that it was not a question, either; it was already decided that she should be as miserable as she could be. Who would not be most miserable to be born into a world where they were not wanted?

Every day she felt herself to be the one—the only one among all the twelve—who had no right to be anywhere; sometimes she questioned whether she had any right to be at all; she had no rights, no position; she was the only one who could be spared as well as not, aye, better than not; for without her perhaps Nan could have the summer silk that she wished for aloud every day; and if it were not for her, it might be that Archie could go to the Mercantile College; and if it were not for *her* food and clothing, the money to buy Robin a piano might be squeezed out—poor little Robin, who never could have the things she wanted!

All the others had a place, all the others had something to do for somebody, even the baby, Number Twelve, as Arch called him, had the right to be the baby—the sweetest, plumpest, laughinest baby that ever was born. Celia was the eldest, and she had the right to be the eldest, for what could the eleven be or do without her? Six boys and six girls! But they couldn't be an even number without her, or an even number of each; for an instant one day this thought had brought some little consolation, but like her other consolations it had taken speedy flight. Papa liked to say, "My twelve," and she helped to make the twelve, that was all; or to mar the twelve, was that it?

"Twelve children, and all perfect excepting—" she had overheard an old lady remark only yesterday. All perfect excepting herself, and she was lame. What did any body want her for? Who needed her? There would be five girls and six boys without her; if she were not there, Trude would sit next to Ned at the table, and Robin would sleep with Mollie; no one would miss her; "Shoes for Electa" would not be so often—would not be at all—in the family expense book that Celia kept and added up every month; she did not ask mamma for money as often as the others did. How could she, when she had no right to it? She did not like to ask God for any thing, either, for she served Him so fitfully that she had no heart to ask for His good things; only for the forgiveness of sins,—she must ask Him for that;

she could live and bear her other burdens, but she could not bear the burden of making Ilim sorrowful.

Celia did not need her. She had mamma to love best, and she had some one beside that she must love better than mamma; and Nan did not need her, for Nan had Mollie and some one else; and Mollie and Martyn, the twins, had each other; Robin seemed to love Trude better than she loved her, and the boys all had each other; no one "had" her, and she had nobody in particular. People were very kind to her, too kind, she bitterly thought sometimes; they pitied her because she was not like the others. Oh, why hadn't God made her like the others? Why had He thought about them and forgotten to think about her? Or why had He not given her a beautiful face or some wonderful gift to compensate for her unlikeness? She was not as pretty as Nan and she could not sing like Robin, and every one was not attracted to her as they were to Mollie, and she could not talk as entertainingly as Trude, and oh! what was she born at all for to be different from the others?

Papa and mamma had eleven beside her, eleven without her. Did every body have enough without her? Oh, if somebody somewhere only didn't have enough without her! She would do any thing for any body, and go anywhere, if she might only be needed!

The girls all had their special work to do, at

home and elsewhere; they did all their own work, and the work that she might have done, they were always keeping her from doing; saving her strength, they said, reminding her that she was not strong, taking out of her hands little things that she longed to do that she might the better take care of herself. And the dreariest of all work was this dreary taking care of herself; taking care of herself for herself. They were all working for each other and bidding her think only of herself. She wished that she had no self to think about; she could be as happy as any body if it were not for herself.

Why had she not been born a boy? If Arch had been born a girl and she a boy, there would still be the even number, and Arch would not have been in the way in the house, and she could have found something to do on the farm or out in the world; there was room out in the world for a boy, but who, out in the world, wanted a girl, one who was lame and not strong and who didn't know how to do any thing?

She loved this old front yard, because out here she was not in any body's way. Under the wide heavens with the wide earth all around her, how could she be in any body's way? In the house when she was not sitting in Celia's chair or reading Robin's book, she was using Mollie's thimble; and when she was not troubling Trude, she was doing something that Nan did not like; and then the boys—oh, dear! she could not get on with

the boys as the other girls did, only with Vail; she wasn't sweet and lovely; oh, dear, she wasn't any thing. She almost wished that she wasn't anywhere. She almost wished that there was another baby, and then there would be somebody to need her. It was very queer to be waiting until somebody should be born before somebody should need her; the world was so full, so over full of people, and yet with all its overflowingness she had to wait for somebody else to come. Perhaps in this very hour that she was bewailing herself under the maples, some child was being born for her to be good to, or some one was dying and leaving behind some one that would take her instead, or some one was feeling herself to be another odd one and crying out for her. But how could she find that other one? The way was long and so tangled for her poor lame feet, and she did not know which way to go. If she only needed herself, but what did she need herself for?

Two fretted and fretful tears rolled slowly down her cheeks; the grass was growing at her feet, the leaves were thick overhead, a bird was flying high up in the blue, the water in the brook was running over the stones; they were all doing God's good pleasure, they all had something to do, they were not wasting themselves; and she was wasting herself on herself.

Wasn't any thing wasted? How many blossoms there had been on the apple-tree near the kitchen window; they had been blown away and how few

apples were forming; all those fair blossoms and so little fruit! Out upon the prairies, out in the woods, down in the ocean, in the vegetable, in the mineral, in the animal kingdoms were there not numberless lives being wasted? Did God like wasted things? Was He so rich that He could afford to make waste?

Was He so rich in people that He could afford to make her for nothing? Was she like an apple blossom drifting down from an overloaded tree? Was her life a hidden wasted life that God could afford to forget? Did He have enough without her? Sometimes she did not kiss papa and mamma good-night and among so many they did not seem to miss it; so among so much love and service, God would not miss hers; she could creep back into herself and live unto herself, and He would not notice it; but it was so empty within herself; the things that she wanted she could not find within herself.

It was stupid and discouraging and utterly selfish to take care of herself all the time; every thing that she had done that morning had been done for herself. But suppose—the thought flashed through her heart and mind like a flash of sunshine—that she could not do any of these things for herself, then some one would have to do them for her! Suppose that she could not dress herself or feed herself! Suppose that she were helpless, a burden upon all the others! Suppose they all had to wait upon her, instead of doing for the

others! That *was* a comfort! If she must be in the world, she could not give thanks for her creation as papa gave thanks for his; but, if she must be in the world, she was glad that she had power to keep herself from being a trial, a hardship, and a drag to other people. She was the trial, the hardship, the drag to herself, but nobody knew it. How many times she sighed before Vail reached the gate.

"Celia, Celia!"

The voice came from upstairs. Some one was always calling Celia.

In two minutes there was a call through the house for Nan, and before another two minutes had passed somebody called Robin. Another two minutes passed, but nobody called "Electa." They were all afraid of troubling her, or disturbing her; the children had grown up to learn that Electa must never be disturbed. If Vail had been nearer he would have found something to call her for; she was never too busy to play quiet games with him, to read to him, or to answer his questions. Every one in the house, every one save papa, Electa, and the baby were too busy to attend to Vail.

Papa had named the farm-house The Beehive; the hum of cheery life began before sunrise in summer-time, and ended—no one knew when it ended, not even Celia who was usually the last to fall asleep.

There were so many to do every thing; so many

to set the table, to wash the dishes, so many to sweep, to sew, to make and to mend, so many to hunt up lost things, so many to suggest, so many to ask questions, so many to answer questions, so many to play pranks, so many to say funny things, so many to keep up the chorus of conversation, so many to pet and to be petted; enough for ornament, enough for use, enough for every practical and theoretical purpose, enough for the prose of life, enough for its poetry, enough for every thing, enough for every body, enough without her.

The kitchen was always full; so were parlors and halls and piazzas; it was always full upstairs, down-stairs, out-of-doors and indoors. Beside the twelve and papa and mamma, there were the man and the maid, visitors, old, young, and middle aged, and callers! There always seemed to be a horse at one of the hitching posts, and always a ring at the door-bell.

The family treasury did not need her, mamma did not need her to help keep house, papa did not need her to help him be a minister, the children did not need her; did any one in her father's parish need her to-day, or any day? Who did need her in all the wide, full, busy world? How could she be thankful for her creation then?

Every one in the Bible seemed to be needed, even of a colt the Lord had said that He had need of him; every body in books had rights and position, and if they had not in the beginning, did they not find the grandest position of all before

the book closed? Wasn't David the youngest and least, and Joseph next to the youngest? and wasn't it the same in fairy stories and poetry? "The youngest princess, Gwendoline," had been running through her head all the morning. In books was it not the weak and despised who were honored at the last?

She herself did not seek any honor, it was only to be like the others that she asked; just like the others: as loving and beloved, as honored and honorable, above all, as useful, as needed; if some one only couldn't do without her, as papa declared that he couldn't do without his old slippers. Not to be a ray of sunshine, not to be a drop of water, not to be a breath of air, only to be somebody's old slippers! How the girls would laugh at her ambition! Celia wanted to be like mamma, Robin aimed at becoming a famous singer, Trude longed to go to Africa as a missionary, Nan said that she was hoping to marry a senator, and Mollie would be satisfied to be nothing less than a queen, and here she was longing, hungering, almost praying to be a pair of old slippers. It was too comical, she laughed aloud with the fretted and fretful tears still on her cheeks. There was nothing that she would not do or dare, there was nothing too hard or too humble, there was nothing that she would not give up, if she might only serve one who needed her services.

"Why, papa!" she exclaimed, lifting her eyes then dropping them ashamed of her wet cheeks.

"Why, daughter!"

Papa threw himself down beside her, stretching himself at his full long length on the grass, turning his face away from her and pulling a blade of grass and biting it. Papa's eyes were very black and his hair and side whiskers very white.

"Papa, is God so rich that He can afford to waste?"

"Just as rich as that."

"Does He make things to be wasted?"

"He has made things that I don't know the use of, if that is what you mean."

"I can't understand why some people have so much and some so little—the very things that some people want are wasting somewhere and He knows it."

"Well?"

"It doesn't seem well to me. I don't like to think that He makes things to be wasted. And I don't like to think that He makes people to be wasted."

"Who says that He makes people to be wasted?"

"I know they *are* wasted—lives are, human lives are."

"Are they? I don't agree with you."

"Don't you agree with me that things are wasted?"

"Weeds and grasses and woods! Flowers that grow in solitude, perfumes loading the winds that sweep across deserts and seas; we say, also, wastes of water and wastes of sand; waste is made by

frost, by excess of rain, by excess of heat. What cargoes of pearls are hidden in the sea; what wealth of gold and diamonds are hidden in His caverns in the earth! In the Gulf Stream alone there is a greater amount of mill force than in all the rivers on the face of the earth. Think of all the fires underground, what do they produce save now and then, here and there, an earthquake? God is so rich in fire and yet people freeze to death. I have twelve children to love me and the richest man for miles around would give all he possesses for one little one of his very own to love him. Our rich Father has enough and to spare, enough to waste, it seems, and yet people hunger for the things that He seems to throw away. Are you hungering, daughter?"

Electa loved her father, but she could not tell him how her heart was aching. How could he understand?

"I rejoice that you are among the blessed: 'Blessed are they that hunger.'"

He arose leisurely and walked away, not looking at her again.

In an instant he returned and laid his hand on her bowed head. "Child," he said, "your necessities are your wealth."

"Then I'm richer than I ever expected to be," she replied lightly.

"To be pressed into a corner, to be straitened, to be in want, to be forced out of one's self is as much to give God thanks for as creation

itself. Be thankful that you are born and born hungry."

"I can't," thought Electa, but she said nothing, and her father loitered and lingered down the path towards the gate as Vail had done.

Electa's half glad, half sorrowful musing was broken in upon by the sound of a sob, followed by her father's voice in gentle pleading. Her father was bending over the low gate, a slight, bent figure clad in gray, with the face concealed by a shaker, stood before him.

Electa recognized the gray figure, and rising moved nearer to them.

"I ain't got any Saviour," the voice sobbed.

"Oh, yes, you have. Every body has a Saviour; ask Him to give you peace of mind."

"That's what I want," cried the tremulous voice eagerly. "I shall never have peace of mind. I expect that God is troubled about the people in this world; there's so much trouble, trouble, trouble in the world."

The feeble, white fingers grasped the minister's, the bent form tried to straighten itself, the shaker nodded, and the gray figure moved slowly away.

"I ain't got any Saviour!" The words fell cold and heavy on Electa's heart. Poor old Mrs. Wayne! Every one knew her; she had not had "peace of mind" for thirty years. She was one of the people out in the world. Electa shivered and turned towards the house,—the bright breezy house with its many voices and wide open win-

dows. The Beehive was in the world, but not out in the world.

"Electa, child."

Ah, some one was calling her at last. The voice was clear and full, sweet and low with singing to sleep such a little world of baby-hood; it was a voice that gave the listener a desire to see the face, and the listener was rarely disappointed, for the face was sunshine itself, and peacefulness itself; it was as sunny as the sunshine and as peaceful as the blue of the sky; there was nothing sunny in the tinge of the hair and nothing blue in the eyes; the eyes were large and brown, and the hair, as brown as the eyes with threads of silver sprinkled through it, was brought down low over the forehead, the cheeks were as tinted as a maiden's, and the lips as fresh as the baby's own; there were freckles on the low forehead and on the cheeks under the eyes, but no one thought of them as a defect, they were a part of her prettiness. If she had been seamed and scarred, I suspect that the children and the parish would have thought it beautiful, and, being a part of herself, it would have been beautiful. None of her girls and boys lived a cheerier life than the mother of the twelve. Papa said that mamma was the youngest of them all. Mamma had learned that life's burdens were not to be borne, or to be borne only long enough to feel that they were burdens; but the children, the older ones, had only learned that life held burdens and that they were burden bear-

ers; poor Electa's hidden burden was the heaviest and dreariest one of all. Each was bearing a burden that none other knew, even papa and mamma had their own trials that they lovingly kept from each other; lovingly kept from each other, but lovingly gave to God.

"Electa!"

The brown head with its many silver threads pushed itself through the honeysuckles that shaded the window.

"Can you come in a moment, we are all busy, and give this old man some bread and meat?"

The old man stood on the back porch holding tightly in one hand a small black satchel. She laid the bread and meat pityingly into his hand for he was feeble and white-haired. His listless expression changed as he looked at her.

"Do you know about the man at the Beautiful Gate?" he asked eagerly.

"No, sir," said Electa.

"At the Beautiful Gate of the Temple? He was lame, don't you remember?"

"Yes, sir," said Electa, flushing and feeling inclined to tell him, white-haired as he was, that he was rude and impertinent.

"They won't let me stop over night, and it's the dominie's house, too. They don't think about the Lord's people. I often think about Peter and John and Paul; perhaps they hadn't a place to stay all night in. That night that Paul preached so long, I think it was because people wouldn't take him

in and keep him all night, so he had to preach. Don't you remember, the young man fell out of the window?"

"Yes, I remember; would you like a glass of milk?"

"Yes, thank you."

Electa stood still, not daring to stir, fearing that he would allude to her lameness again.

"Nan," she called. Nan was hulling strawberries in the kitchen. "Please bring a glass of milk."

"In a second," replied a voice. This voice was also like the face, round and plump.

Electa edged herself away, down the two steps, and hurriedly hid herself among the currant bushes. Hot, angry, rebellious tears burned her eyes and cheeks. "How can I go—anywhere?—how can I do—any thing?" she cried, chokingly. "I can't, I can't, I *can't* be thankful that I am born. There isn't any Beautiful Gate, and I've got to bear it all my life."

There were voices on the porch, she shrank more within herself, crouching closer to the ground, completely hidden by the currant bushes.

"I've got to bear it all my life," she moaned, hugging herself in her agony. "Nobody wants me, nobody needs me, I'm different from other girls. Oh, I can't be glad that I am born."

"The Spirit cometh as it listeth"; there was no sound, no voice, the leaves about her were not stirred, a wren flew over her head, there was a

laugh within the house, a sound of "whoa, get up there" came across the fields, nothing was changed, nobody saw, nobody heard, God was thinking about His desolate child and spoke to her, not with upbraiding, not with counsel, not with new love or tenderness, only with His truth—

"*Of His own will beget He us.*" Of His own will! It was God's own will then that she should be! That she should be just as she was. She was born out of God's own will. His will had made her; His strong, strong will; she could not fight against His will, He was too strong; she would not, He was too loving. She had just as much right to be in the world as Christ had to be in the world; He came because it was God's will, and so had she. Now she had a right, now she had position. She arose and stood upright and strong, God's child in God's world. He knew whether or not He needed her; He knew before He beget her of His own will. If He needed her to do nothing and be nothing she would try to be content; it was enough, in this hour, to be because she had a right to be, and to be where she was, simply because she had a right to be where she was. His will could carry her through. At that instant she could have gone at His bidding through fire or flood. She was born again when she felt that she was born of His own will.

"Papa," she said that night, "I want to join the Church."

"Well, daughter," he said, kissing her, "I knew

that you would come; I knew that all my children would come."

Mamma put her arms around her and said that she was glad, Celia and Nan and Mollie and Robin gave her an extra kiss, Martyn gave thanks for another one brought into the fold at family prayer the next morning, and then no one said any thing more about it. They were never surprised at any good thing coming to them; they would have been very much surprised had the good thing not come.



II.

OUTSIDE OF HERSELF.

"Do every thing for us that is in Thine heart to do for us, and make us able to receive it," prayed papa one morning.

Electa's heart had been full with her own petitions until that instant; she caught the words uttered with such fulness of meaning, and her whole self leaped forward to grasp them; she kept them in her heart, pondering them many a day. All that was in God's heart for her to have; oh, how much that would be! Celia thought, 'All, that is in God's heart for me to give up;' papa thought; "All that is in God's heart for me to be."

That afternoon Celia and Nan and Mollie were all three of them up in a cherry-tree; the four-quart pail was piled full of delicious oxheart cherries, the six-quart pail was nearly filled; the three girls, the eldest three among the twelve, were laughing, chattering, and eating cherries, as light-heartedly as if all their world were bounded by the shade of the tree. They had been chatting about home affairs and village news, about making a dress for Trude and trimming Electa's hat,

about how often John Knight called upon Susie Prentiss and wondering if he "meant any thing"; would Ned's summer suit do, or must he have another? Must Cousin Emma be invited for next week or the week after? Would it be queer if they should attend the meeting to decide about the festival when every body knew that the proceeds were for the back salary? Somebody ought to call upon Mrs. Weaver, who had lost her baby, and who should go with mamma? And wasn't Electa looking pale? And Robin hadn't been as bright as usual for a few days. And *wasn't* papa's last sermon lovely?

Celia had looked all day as if her lips were tired of keeping a secret; suddenly she stopped in her work of picking, and breaking off a twig near her hand exclaimed abruptly, "I got you up here, girls, to tell you something; Arch and Ned will upbraid us for encroaching upon their territory, but it did seem so old-time-ish, so like the days when we were young and giddy that I couldn't forbear! And I have something to burst upon you, so be prepared to burst."

"You are not going to be married!" cried Nan in alarm.

"No," said Celia, picking among the cherries and tossing away a rotten one, "no, I am not—ever, so we'll dismiss that subject, if you please, now and forever."

Nan looked ready to cry, Mollie opened her lips, then closed them resolutely; if that were all, there

was no more to be said. No more after this long five years' engagement; Halstead Seymour had been one of them so long, and now he was not to be any thing.

"Why, Celia!" she began; but Celia was not one to be questioned, and Mollie put a rotten cherry into her mouth and was silent.

"Now, girls!—Mollie, stop eating, and Nan, you stop picking.—this matter demands serious consideration."

Nan dropped a cherry into the six-quart pail, stepped down upon a lower branch, and settled herself back against the trunk to listen. Every thing seemed dizzy and queer; it was as queer for Celia not to marry Halstead Seymour as for cherries not to be cherries. Mollie dropped a ripe cluster to the ground, detached the skirt of her dress from a dead twig, and stood looking down at her eldest sister.

Through Celia's torn hat a ray of light fell across her hair and face. Celia was the homeliest among the twelve; her face was long and sallow, her eyes large and dark, but not expressive, her hair grew low over her forehead, and, to her grief, somewhat thickly upon her upper lip; the large, frank, smiling mouth and perfect teeth atoned for that defect, but Celia did not believe it. Fredrika Bremer had taken her hair out by the roots and made for herself a high forehead, but Celia had failed in her attempt to do the same thing; therefore had left her forehead as God had made it, not

without tears and a struggle, however. In Celia's face Mollie could see only her strength of character, her utter unselfishness, her womanliness, her motherliness.

"Listen, girls, I am going away from home!"

"Away from home!" cried Nan.

"Away from home," echoed Mollie, in the tone in which she would have echoed, "Away from heaven."

"Yes, I am going away; I want to; I want to earn something."

"You are!" cried Nan.

"You know that you are not," exclaimed Mollie.

"Tell us something else."

"What under the sun?—" began Nan.

"What in the name of sense?—" began Mollie.

"Haven't you a good home? Isn't every body kind to you? Are you hungry, or thirsty, or cold, or naked or unappreciated?" inquired Nan seriously. "Are you tired of us?"

"I do not choose—yes, I do—I choose to go. If we are the salt of the earth, I want to go out to help salt it a little."

"Oh a missionary spirit!" exclaimed Mollie.

"Nothing of the kind. I want to go that I may help those at home. If half a dozen of us could go, the other half dozen would fare bountifully."

"Do I eat your share?" inquired Mollie concernedly.

"Do I sleep in your bed?" inquired Nan, looking aggrieved.

"Now, girls, hush up with your nonsense. Somebody ought to earn something; all we have is father's small salary, the farm, and mother's money; and there are—yes, sad and delightful fact,—there are twelve of us! Martyn has rested from college and is ready for the seminary;—Mollie, sit down, you'll fall; and Nan, don't swing that pail; don't look at me so, either;—and Arch wants to go to the Mercantile College, and Trude is 'dying—she says she is—to go to boarding-school; we've all been but Electa, poor child, and now it's Trude's turn. The back salary has been back these three years, the hay crop failed last year, and oats are failing this; every thing on the place is out of repair, and that makes papa uneasy—"

"Papa uneasy," repeated Nan incredulously.

"I'd like to see the thing that *would* worry him," supplemented Mollie. "I'd like to know what you expect to do. How can you earn money?"

"In more ways than one. I'm not quite as capable as the French lady who could support herself in nineteen different ways, but I can do it in more than one. I can teach ordinary English, and I'm a good dress-maker,—"

"Oh, Cele," groaned Nan. "I don't like to hear you talk so."

"There, now, girls, I've said it, and I feel better. I didn't sleep half an hour last night. Now we'll go in and can the cherries, and when you eat them next winter think of me as I stood

here in this old calico and resolved to do or die, survive or perish."

"'Give me liberty or give me death,'" shouted Mollie; "'England expects every man to do his duty; ' it is better to be right than to be President; '—but you shan't leave The Beehive, notwithstanding. I'll go myself, first, and go I will not."

"I seem to be the only one that can be spared," continued Celia, meditatively. "Electa is eager to help, she seems to have new heart to work lately, and you girls can do my work between you. I suppose you could send Bridget away; you would have to work like little dogs, though, and have no time for fun or going out."

"Papa and mamma never will let you go," said Nan decidedly, "you may as well make up your mind to that."

"Papa and mamma are reasonable," replied Celia.

"You'll see; you know you don't dare tell them. Now, confess, do you?" asked Nan, laughing.

"Not yet, perhaps. I shall approach the subject by degrees. I have decided for myself that it is the right thing to do. What was I born the oldest for? If I had been born Charles instead of Celia, you would all have expected me to help along; as it is, being Celia, why shouldn't I help along? What's the difference?"

"You can help along by staying home," said Mollie.

"I may better go than you," suggested Nan, "we can as well spare mamma as you."

"No, I'll go," decided Mollie. "Cele shan't go, that's certain."

"Suppose we all go," said Celia. "If the boys had only come first, then they could have helped the younger ones along; but I suppose that mother was glad of us girls."

"She is now, anyway," said Nan.

"If I were to be married," Celia spoke very steadily, "you would think it right for me to go, and plan to do without me; now, what's the difference, pray?"

"May I see the difference or never get married!" laughed Nan. "I'm as sure you won't go as I am that I shall stay. Martyn will never let you go."

"Nor Arch!" said Mollie, "perhaps we can earn money staying home. Time is money and we all have plenty of that."

"Girls! Girls!" shouted Vail from the piazza, "here's a carriage load coming."

"And these cherries to be canned!" exclaimed Celia. "You go and be entertaining, and I'll can the cherries."

"Electa can see them," said Nan.

"She can face the cannon's mouth easier," said Mollie.

"I hope they don't mean tea," said Nan, "for we have just cake enough for our original number; we can stuff them with cherries, I suppose; look, Cele, are they driving in? Can you see who they are?"

"Only callers," replied Celia, peering through

the leaves; "Mrs. Allen and her two daughters and some of their boarders."

Electa had been sitting at an upper window reading "Enoch Arden"; voices never disturbed her, she seldom heard a word of the conversation around her while she was reading or writing; Vail had learned that to attract her attention, he must shout into her ear if she were reading. It might be that she had caught the sound of her own name, or that she had laid aside the book to muse, but certainly she had heard every word of the conversation that related to Celia's sudden determination.

Did Celia—busy, helpful, happy Celia—think that she was not needed at home? Mamma could not spare her, she was mamma's other self; mamma would grow old if Celia went away; home would not be home to any of them without Celia; but they would not miss *her*. Could she not go in Celia's stead? She could not earn so much money as Celia, perhaps she could not earn any at all, perhaps she could earn only enough to support herself; but that would be better than staying at home and adding one more to the family burden; no one would miss her; no one was always saying "Where's Electa!" But could she go? Wouldn't it kill her to go among strangers? All her life she had dreaded strangers; an unfamiliar face, a strange voice had been the terror of her shrinking childhood; it seemed easier to lie down, close her eyes and die, than to thrust herself out into a world of strange faces and strange voices. Mamma had

been too indulgent, it may have been, her dread had been tenderly dealt with; the other children had been sent on errands and expected to greet strangers, and lame little Electa had been kept under the household wing near to papa or close to mamma.

"I fear that I've been too careful of her," mamma sighed sometimes and she would have sighed again could she have understood her reverie this afternoon.

Celia was so strong and brave, so old, her thoughts ran on; she was twenty-five while she herself was only seventeen; she was fitted to go out from the home fold, the home care, the home keeping; no one would look curiously at her, no one would whisper about her, no one would pity her and be kind to her because they were so sorry for her, poor thing! And she could help at home, if Celia should go away; she could find her niche, there would be enough for her to do; she had always thought that she would like to do the work that Celia did, and here it was falling into her hands. Would it be right for her to refuse to do it? She remembered a quotation of her father's: it was something about the hard thing usually being the right thing; but this thing was too hard. God was not a hard master. He did not exact it of her. Papa had said that it was a great sin to act as if God were a hard master. If some one must go, why not Nan or Mollie or Robin? But they shrank from it even as she did; no, not so much;

there was nothing about them that people could laugh at or pity; but Mollie could not leave mamma, she never could stay away from mamma, and Nan was homesick if she went away to stay a week, and Robin—Robin was always doing things for papa,—Robin could not go; beside mamma could not do without them; she herself, was the only one that the whole household could do without. Papa had said last Sunday in Sunday school that people should look about them, first of all in the homes into which they were born; she had looked about her, and beside Jesus *went about* doing good, therefore she might go about, too. It was a necessity for the others and for herself that she should go. Her necessities were her wealth, she would certainly find wealth of some kind in this. As no one would miss her—wouldn't Vail miss her?—she would be the best one to go; they did not need her to stay, perhaps they needed her to go. But what could she do out in the world? She glanced down at her slender, white hands they were pretty and well-kept, but they were not very useful hands. They could sew, they could write as no other hands in the house could write; she might teach little children, and she could become a nurse; they all said that she was the nurse of the family. But where could she go to do these things? Oh, how could she—so shrinking, so awkward, so ignorant!—how could she bear to live among strangers; to talk to them, eat with them, sleep with them. No, she must sleep alone, and

she had never slept alone but one night, and then she had covered up her head and almost suffocated herself, because she had heard the death-watch tick. Celia could go, she must go, or Nan, or Mollie, or Robin; they were none of them afraid of strangers, they would none of them be stared at, or talked about, or pitied.

"I don't want to go," she cried aloud, with a choking in her throat. "I wish that I hadn't thought of it. I can't go. I *won't* go. I am younger than they are! And I am not strong; they will not be so cruel as to let me go. I should die away from home. Oh, mamma, mamma, don't let me go away."

"Electa," the voice was at the door, "you are dressed and mamma is busy just this minute, and Robin and Trude haven't come home from the picnic, and the others of us are all cherry stains, do go down and see those folks, and say that some of us will be down soon."

"I don't want to," said Electa, "oh, Mollie, I don't know some of them."

"No matter, chicken, you'll soon know them. How will you ever go out into the world?"

"I never will," replied Electa resolutely. "I don't want to go down, Mollie."

"Take your life in your hand and run along; mamma will be there to bring you to in five minutes."

Electa laughed and arose; she stood before the glass to study the face and figure the strangers

would have to look at. A slight figure, there was nothing the matter with that, a graceful little head set upon graceful shoulders, although Electa could not perceive it, an oval face, the only lovely complexion in the family, light-blue eyes with long dark lashes, a sweet shy mouth; the eyes when she raised them were so pleading and loving and intelligent that strangers were wont to look again; of course her eyes could not see this in themselves, they could not see the tender beauty of the mouth; all they saw was a troubled face slightly reddened, a pink muslin dress somewhat rumpled, the white muslin tie rather soiled, and the two long braids too ragged for company.

"I must braid my hair over, Mollie."

"Well, be quick about it then; they can look at the books and views and notice how worn the carpet is getting and wonder if we whitewashed this spring and why the white shades are not done up oftener. That will keep them in conversation."

But Electa did not hurry in rebraiding her hair, and Mrs. Given and the baby were ready to welcome the callers before Electa went down.

"That proves that I can't go out into the world," thought Electa, after she had gotten through the introductions and blunderingly replied "Yes, sir" to one of the ladies. She gave confused answers, dared not venture an original remark, and kept her usually clear voice down her throat all through the trying interview.

"Rather gawky," was one of the ladies' verdict

when some one alluded to Electa; "girls of that age are apt to be."

"Did you say that she was intelligent?" asked another, "she can not frame two intelligent sentences. She blushes and mutters as if she had always lived in the back woods."

"She has a lovely face," another hastened to say.

"If she wouldn't color so, and look so distressed," was the light reply. "The others are perfect ladies; I don't see why she should be so different."

So different! Alas, that was always it. After they had wandered around the front yard and back yard and gathered flowers and eaten cherries, Electa had left them—Nan and Celia escorted them to the carriage—Electa sauntering back, completely hidden by the shrubbery, had overheard every word; they had spoken in loud, careless voices. Every tone had pierced Electa's heart through and through. Gawky and unintelligent, muttering and looking distressed, as if she had always lived in the back woods; the world would say that about her; oh, that was as bad as being lame! She would never, never be introduced to any one again; she would never meet another stranger as long as she lived. This was the second conversation that she had overheard that day, both of which influenced all her life; she was destined to overhear a third which also influenced all her life. In these years, it seemed afterward to Electa, every event, every conversation of any weight, every person whom she met, every thought of her own

influenced all her life. The thing that she was most eager to know, the thing that she most dreaded to know, was the opinion of others concerning herself; afterward, it was the truth concerning herself that she cared to know. Late that evening she lay in the hammock swinging to and fro with a gentle motion and through a gap in the honeysuckle at the end of the piazza looking off towards the moon-lighted hills. The hammock was swung on the front piazza near the front parlor windows; there had been lights and voices, singing, talk, and laughter all the evening; Mollie, Nan, and Trude had each come out to her, persuading her to go in among them; Robin had started to come out to her, but Celia had detained her saying, "The child is thinking about something, let her alone."

The light laughter, the glad voices, the gay words that floated out to her jarred her as though she were in great physical nervous pain; they were beings of another world, they were all alike, nobody ever made fun of them; how happy it would be to live in there among them, and be like them; to whirl around as Mollie and Trude were doing, to give bright answers as Nan was doing to that gentleman that she had never seen before, and to sit down to the organ and play and sing as unconcerned about herself as Robin was doing, to walk around as easily as Celia was doing, speaking such little pleasant words and bringing a bright look to people's faces; even Martyn and

Arch were not "gawky," and Guy and Vail and Ned never muttered when spoken to, and never said the wrong thing; even Vail did not mind being introduced, and would never be guilty of such a mistake as introducing a lady as "Mr. Latimer," and the gentleman as "Miss Middendorf," as she herself had confusingly done last week. There were but three visitors this evening, and two of them were village people, but she felt too ashamed of herself, with "gawky" and "distressed" burning into her soul, to go in among them.

Two or three times she moved a little nearer the open window to catch the conversation; the stranger from the city was telling them about a friend of his who was well acquainted with a heathen queen; the boys had tied themselves into a knot and stationed themselves in front of him, the girls, in a cluster, were as near to him as they could be, and papa and mamma were looking as interested as the boys and girls. Vail was asking questions, sitting on the stranger's knee, and Ned was coaxing him to come next day and climb a cherry-tree with him.

Electa swung back and kept away from the window; she was not in their good times, she was not like them, she was somebody different.

"I haven't seen your daughter Electa," she heard the stranger say. "I saw her as I drove past yesterday; I felt as if I must see her again."

"Perhaps he wants to see if I really limp or if

he only imagined so," Electa thought with a hard, bitter feeling towards him. Mamma had always said that Electa had a sweet heart, but the sweet heart was hard and bitter to-night. She could not feel like loving God just now.

"Excuse her to-night, please," Celia hastened to say, "you shall see her to-morrow when you come to climb the cherry-tree."

"Will he?" thought Electa laughing to herself.

But this was not the conversation that influenced all her life. The lights were out, the visitors gone, and the girls had said good-night and gone upstairs. Electa had not gone in to evening worship, because the stranger had remained; papa had read the chapter in the Bible, but the stranger had led them in prayer. She moved nearer to listen to the prayer. She liked to listen to prayer; this prayer was a very queer one. He prayed about every body and every thing; he prayed about her, too, naming her as "the absent daughter"; he asked that she might be ready to listen when God should speak to her.

"Oh, I want to be," she sighed, with quick coming tears.

Her mother came out to kiss her good-night, and to say that she must stay out in the night air but a few moments longer. "Yes'm," she said obediently, and then before she knew it she was asleep.

"Then you will not reconsider?"

Electa awoke with a start; the voice was very cold.

"No, not again. I have considered and reconsidered. Halstead, I have been a whole year deciding. Do you think it can be the freak of a moment? I am not a girl, I am a woman. I feel as old as mamma. You must not speak so to me."

Electa made a motion to rise, but they were too near her; they were standing in the path at the foot of the piazza steps. They would think that she had been listening; she dared not rise, she hardly dared keep still.

"I will never give you up, Celia Given."

"You have already given me up; I do not belong to you. How can I belong to any one who will not take Christ, my Lord, and love Him too?"

"You can help me and teach me."

"I have been trying to do that for years; how much have I helped you in all this time? Tell me, have I helped you?"

"I might have been worse but for you," he said sullenly. "I joined the Church to please you."

"I knew that, I warned you."

"Can't you trust me, Celia? Try me once again."

"Aren't you almost engaged to Jennie Hood?"

He shuffled his feet, he laughed. "If you throw me over, she will take me."

"Then God have mercy on her," exclaimed Celia with intense quietness. "Good-night, Halstead. Good-by. I hope that I shall never see you again, —you have not broken my heart; too many people love me and depend upon me for you to do that. I am glad that you are going away; I shall not

miss you, I shall miss the Halstead Seymour that I trusted."

"Then you will not reconsider?" he pleaded.

"I tell you, *no*. May God keep you from punishment and give you repentance. I don't know how to love a wicked man. I didn't know that there was any one in the world as wicked as you are."

Could that be Celia's voice? It sounded as though she had both arms around herself to keep herself from falling.

"Will you kiss me good-by? I am going away to-morrow."

"No!"

Electa arose and stood upon the piazza; they would see her if she moved towards the door; she tried to walk away to the opposite end of the piazza, but her shoes would step heavily; there was nothing to do but to stand still.

There was a sound of tears, of broken, subdued weeping—Celia had broken down. His voice was so low that Electa heard not a word.

"I would rather *die* than marry you," Celia cried excitedly, "go away from me."

"I don't want the ring," Electa heard him say.

"Wear it for the sake of old times, Celia."

"The old times are dead and buried, and so are you."

"Will you pray for me? There's no one in the world to pray for me but you."

"What shall I pray for?"

"Ask God not to punish me and not to pay me

back in my own coin." Electa by many slow and creaking steps had reached the end of the piazza, and buried her face among the honeysuckle. The fragrance of honeysuckle ever afterward reminded her of Celia's great trouble. She herself had always admired Halstead Seymour because he was so handsome, such a perfect gentleman, and so attentive to Celia.

Celia came slowly up the steps; Electa did not turn; she heard his footsteps on the grass.

"Electa, are you there still?"

"Yes," answered Electa with her face in the honeysuckle. Celia came to her and put both arms around her.

"Go to bed, child."

"I'm sorry, Celia; I couldn't help being in the hammock."

"I know it; don't fret about it. I hope that you haven't taken cold."

"Look at the moon."

"Isn't it cold? I don't like a cold moon. Now run to bed."

"Will you go to bed too?" asked Electa tenderly.

"Yes, dear; I must do a few things first. Papa is in the study; he must write late to-night. Now, birdie, fly to your nest; my birdlings are all safe."

If she could only say something to comfort her! All her heart burst out in a caress and quick words that surprised herself, "O Celia, I'm glad that you'll never *have* to go away; only some good,

good man shall have you—some one like papa, or the strange gentleman that was here to-night."

With a kiss Celia sent her upstairs, then went about the house to do the last things. The study door was ajar; Celia needed human love and comforting to-night. "Papa!" She stood upon the threshold. The white head was bent over a pile of neatly written manuscript.

"Papa!" she went to him, lifted his head with both hands, and kissed his lips.

"Why, daughter, not in bed yet?"

"Pray for me," she whispered huskily. "I have sent Halstead away. I shall never see him any more."

"You are a brave and good woman."

Like a very weak woman she staggered up the stairs holding tightly to the railing.

"I have lived my life," she thought, alone in the dark an hour after midnight; "it has ended very soon; I wasn't ready to give it up."

At the same instant, alone in the dark, Electa was resolving with prayers and tears and great sinking of heart that she would go away instead of Celia; Celia must not go now that she was in such dreadful trouble, she must not leave papa and mamma and Guy. Guy had been Celia's baby since Baby had come. She fell asleep sobbing, "I will go; I will go." Awaking suddenly with the dread of going away upon her, she opened her eyes upon the light, the door of her chamber stood partly open, the hall was flooded with light.

The strange light, the strange, bright light was a sign for her, a word from God that He was pleased with her self-renunciation; the stranger's prayer was answered so soon; God was speaking, and she was ready to hear. Awed and thrilled, she was too thoroughly startled to look again towards the light, she crept shiveringly down into the bed and covered her head. God was very near and she was afraid; trembling and shaking and yet exalted to ecstatic tears, she thanked Him again and again, vowing to go away as soon as she could, and to be self-denying and helpful all her life. With the memory of this sudden and bright light in her heart, it was not hard for her to awake as joyful as the birds.

The strange gentleman called to climb the cherry-tree, but Electa, catching a glimpse of him at the gate, and fearing that he would ask for her, snatched her garden hat and hurried out of the back door. With a book upon insects she passed the next hour under the shadow of a stack of new hay behind the barn.

Vail found her there after the strange gentleman had gone. "Oh, why didn't you come?" he cried regretfully, "we had a splendid time; nobody could find you, and he's going away to stay a year; he promised us that he'd come again next year in cherry time."

"I shan't be here then, either," she said almost sorrowfully.

"O, papa, papa!" Mollie had cried that morn-

ing, "you dear, darling, absent-minded papa! Do you know what you did last night? You left your study lamp in the hall and both burners burned all night; I came down this morning and found it just going out."

"Did I do that?" he asked coloring. He was very sensitive concerning his absent-mindedness.

"I went out to the well for a glass of cool water and came in and forgot it. Perhaps it was providential."

Mollie was not always patient with papa's "providential" carelessness. They never knew how providential it was to Electa. Poor Electa shed some bitter tears when she learned that she had been deceived. Her interpretation—her misinterpretation rather—was one of those mistakes that God deals with very tenderly. She was so anxiously eager to hear His voice and behold His face that she could not wait until He revealed Himself; she had made a face and voice for herself. Hard tears, bitter tears, rebellious tears, reproachful tears she had shed that morning, that very morning in which she awoke as joyful as the birds. Why had God let her deceive herself so? She was so young, so weak, so ignorant; why did He not teach her? It seemed as if He were laughing at her. Did she wish that she could have remained deceived? A thousand times no; she would rather know the heart-breaking truth than to trust in a lie. God had not told her a lie, but He had let her tell herself a lie.

"Why won't you be here?" cried Vail, in astonishment. "Are you going to get married?"

"I don't know where I shall be; I know that I shan't be here," she said resolutely.

Looking up the lane Vail saw a load of hay moving towards him. "Stop for me; wait for me," he shouted wildly, waving his hat and running towards it.

Electa gathered herself together and followed Vail up the lane. Martyn was on the load of hay, Ned was driving. They stopped for Vail, and he climbed to the top, seating himself at Martyn's side with flushed cheeks and quickened breath. Ned coaxed Electa to mount, but she shook her head and walked on. "Are you going to get married?" Vail had innocently asked, for what else could take her away from home?

Electa would have been most humiliatingly ashamed for any one to know it, but Vail's question had touched a sore spot in her heart. Long ago she had decided that she could never be married; all the girls would be married and have happy homes, every one of them excepting herself; they would have children to love and be proud of, and husbands like papa to protect and shield them and teach them every thing and help them to be good; and by and by they would be grandmothers and have more little children to love them; and they would all think about themselves, and not care for her, and papa and mamma would be dead, and—

It was a doleful picture; she tried to shut her eyes to it, only some one, as Vail had done, was always saying something to remind her of it. No one could admire her or love her, because she was lame; she could have done so many things if God had not made her lame. As it was, she must be like a turtle and live in a shell. Life was such a beautiful thing, and this world was such a beautiful world to live in for every one excepting herself. The old clouds had shut themselves in around her with more than their usual darkness and heaviness since her latest disappointment. Other disappointments she had lived through and forgotten, but she never could forget this; she almost thought that she could not live through it.

Up the lane, across the fields, and to the edge of the woods she went, walking slowly with her eyes upon the ground and the book about insects in her hand. She stood at the edge of the woods peering in; deep in its depths it was dark and cool, there were no people there to notice her, no people there for her to shrink from. She would not mind going away from home, if she might go to the woods and live there; but out in the world meant among people, and she hated people.

"Good afternoon."

She was so absorbed in herself that she did not heed the salutation until it was repeated—

"Good afternoon, Miss Electa."

A pair of black eyes were looking down at her from under a broad Panama hat.

"I missed you at home; I am glad to meet you."

"Thank you," she said shyly.

"Are you going into the woods?"

"Yes, sir, to stay forever," she answered, laughing at herself for saying such a thing to a stranger.

"Surely not because you are tired of The Beehive."

"No," drawing a long breath.

"Over a hundred and fifty years ago glass hives were invented; you must excuse me, but I wish that The Beehive were a glass hive."

"What was the use of the glass hives?"

"They were invented that the habits, that the lives of the bees might be studied; now you think my wish impertinent, don't you?"

"Not altogether."

The words of his prayer for her were almost on her lips; had she dared she would have asked him what he had seen in her that he could understand her need, her burden, her desire. After her first glance into the rugged, shrewd, kindly face, he was not a strange stranger. If he had lingered another moment, she felt that she could have asked him; but he lifted his hat and passed on leaving her on the edge of the woods standing irresolute, not caring to go home, not caring to go further into the woods. She wondered if he were a minister; he did not wear a clerical vest and white tie like papa; he was grave and old, but he trod like a young man and his voice sounded more like Martyn's than papa's.

If he had but waited another moment, but an instant, she could have asked him how she might know, how she could know when God spoke to her; she was too shy to ask papa, or mamma, or Celia; they were too near to her, too much in her life; but this stranger could tell her and then go his way, he would never know any thing more about her; with all her morbid dread of strangers it would be easier to ask him this question than to ask any one who lived in her life. If he would turn she would motion to him, for she must know; she had been deceived once, she might always be deceived, if she could not surely know His voice, and she might never again come so near one who knew himself and who could tell her. Ah, there! Yes, he was turning at last; he was stopping, he was standing still, looking up into a tree; he was not very far away, he would hear if she called. But she had forgotten his name; she could not call "Sir," or "Mister," or "Stranger." She might lift her hand, but he was not looking towards her; her feet were riveted to the spot, she had no power to stir. And who would tell her if he did not?

He moved to go on, he stooped to pick something out of the dried leaves, and now he had found some ferns. With an aching, almost breaking heart, she turned her face homewards; it was something new to learn that out in the world she might find help that she had not courage to ask for at home among her own, that *because* people

were strangers she might the more easily open her heart to them.

"Papa," asked Vail that evening, sitting on papa's knee with both arms around his neck, "what kind of a place is the world?"

"Why, little son, the world is just any kind of a place that you please."

"Any kind I want?"

"Any kind you want."

Vail fixed his eyes, the loveliest eyes among the twelve, upon his father's face. "How do you know?" he asked.

"When you are as old as I, you will know how I know."

"How many people are there in the world, papa?"

"About fourteen hundred millions."

"Have you seen them all?"

"Not quite," laughed papa. "I think that I don't want to see them all. I own thirteen of them. I am satisfied."

Among them all, among fourteen hundred millions, there was surely one who needed her; some pair of wayworn feet that needed a pair of old slippers. Electa was not too sentimental to cling to her thought of the old slippers. The stranger was one among the fourteen hundred millions and she had permitted him to slip away from her; must she run after people? But she had run away from him. Perhaps it was enough not to run away from people. She went upstairs early that evening,

while all the others were having a happy time indoors and out of doors; within the house was the sound of singing, and without the house laughter and the sound of the mallet upon the balls. Jennie Hood and several others had come to play croquet. Electa would not play croquet; she could not step like the others. Jennie Hood was wearing a new diamond ring, a cluster; Celia's had been a solitaire. Celia was very pale to-night, but her voice had a brave ring in it that no one had ever heard before, and she was more than usually tender towards them all. For her sake Electa was glad that The Beehive was not built of glass; for her own sake, for the stranger's studying, she wished that it were. Martyn's chamber was in the third story, under the eaves, the one window looked out into the top of a maple-tree. Electa chose it for a retreat to-night that she might be the more alone. Under the maple were the sound of laughter, little shouts of elation or of dismay, and the striking of the balls. Above it all and far away from it all, although she was younger than any of them excepting Trude, she felt old and burdened; burdened because she must go away from them all and because she did not know how to hear when God spoke. Could seventeen years bear any heavier burden? But must she go? She knelt on the narrow strip of carpet under the window, resting both elbows upon the windowsill, and looked out into the green maple leaves. Jennie Hood must not go away from her pretty

home. Lucy Blake was not forced to leave father and mother and brothers and sisters, and Susie Prentiss might stay at home and be as free as a butterfly, and Nan and Robin and Trude and Mollie were as light-hearted as though Martyn and Arch and Trude did not have to be educated at all; if God had not made her different from them she would have been down there among them as light-hearted as they. In the night, while it was dark, she had made her vow, with no influence upon her but God and her own heart and the darkness, and when the shining light came she thought that God had hearkened and registered it upon His book. She has promised God; she must keep her word.

Still no one expected her to go, her decision would be like a bomb-shell dropped down among them, she could see mamma's face, and hear papa's incredulous laugh; and what a chattering there would be among the boys and girls? How Vail would cling to her! Was her vow born of the stillness and darkness and the misleading light, born of her morbid fancy and her sympathy for Celia? Electa had a fashion of turning herself upside down and inside out. Every thing was unchanged, mamma did not look care-worn and papa had spoken about Martyn's going to the seminary that very morning as if it were a plan already settled, and Trude had told the girls at the tea-table that she was going to Bethlehem to school in September. No one had said, "But these things

can't be unless Electa goes away." In the broad sunshine, with them all about her, her courage had oozed away, her vow seemed like an uncomfortable dream, her self-denial became commonplace, it did not savor at all of martyrdom. And then the light—God had not spoken to her!

Electa had many inspirations; one seized her at this instant; she sprang from her knees, almost snatched the Bible from the home-made table near the bed, then paused. Might she do it? Would it be right to shut her eyes and open the Bible and lay her finger upon the page, and if her finger touched the words, "And it came to pass," to believe that God would bring her vow to pass? When she was a little girl at the village school a child had confided to her that this was the way "to find out things." She had tried it then, but had forgotten it until this time of sore need. Hesitating, fearing, doubting, she held the book in her hand. Suppose her fingers should not touch "And it came to pass," might she give up going? Might her vow go for nothing? Would God release her, settle the question for her, and assure her that she was doing His will?

Nerving herself to bear whatever it should be, she closed her eyes, jerked the book open, and tremblingly laid the tip of her finger upon the open page. And now did she dare look? Would she find something to frighten her? Her eyelids quivered, but would not uncloze; with an effort she lifted them and gave a startled glance at the

page, not stirring the tip of her finger. There it was, it must be, she saw the word "pass"; slowly removing her finger she read, "And it shall come to pass." That was stronger still, it meant more than "And it came to pass."

"And it *shall* come to pass!" It was a prophecy; she would accept it and go. Her fingers tightened over the book; the words were really there, in plain, unmistakable English; she could not be deceived as she had been deceived about the shining light. God knew what she was about to do, He knew how vexed and worried and miserable she was, and He had *let* her finger rest upon these words; the words occurred but once upon the two pages, a slight movement either way and her finger would have missed it; had He not guided her finger? It could not be chance, she would try again and prove it; if it did not come that way again, she would be assured that God had moved her finger.

Closing the book again, she stood still a moment with her eyes shut, afraid of God, afraid of being so near to Him, and somewhat afraid that He was not wholly pleased with the thing that she was doing.

Again, again, and yet again she opened the Bible with closed eyes and laid the tip of her finger upon the page; ten times she made the experiment, and not once again did her finger touch the charmed words. She could not be deceived in this; God *had* spoken to her, He meant her to go.

And she would go, if it killed her. Joan of Aro did not lie down to sleep with more content after she had heard the "voices" than did poor little Electa after she believed that God had spoken to her.

But we can believe things that are not true, you know. I do believe that God was speaking to her, and in her mistaken doing, drawing her nearer to Himself, but I do not believe that He was bidding her go away from home. Afterward she learned what it was that God was speaking to her. We hear His voice, oftentimes, but we do not catch His words.

"Mamma" she said the next morning, "may I go away? I want to go somewhere."

Mamma was brushing Baby's hair.

"It will be very good for you; we will think about it, papa and I."

Only good for her! It was very humiliating that after all her sacrifice, it would be good only for herself.



III.

WAITING.

The Bible was becoming, it had already become a new thing to Electa; it was not a book, a printed book containing letters and words and chapters, it was not the story of olden times wherein God spoke His will to men, it was not even the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; it was the Good News according to herself, the Good News as the Holy Spirit brought it to herself; the Good News with all it meant to herself and as it was meant to herself and not to any one else. Her Bible was not Celia's Bible or Nan's or Mollie's or Robin's or Martyn's; it was her own Bible as not one of them could understand it. Celia would have looked grave, Mollie would have laughed, and Martyn would have frowned had they known how in her ignorance she had used the Bible as a heathen might use any "charm" that he possessed.

"God must have spoken to me," Electa argued many times during the day; "if it had been chance it would have come so every time." And she so fully believed that God had spoken to her that

she would have persisted in going, contrary to the wishes and advice of every friend that she had in the world. She would have disobeyed, deliberately and prayerfully, the command of father and mother. Electa was made of the stuff that martyrs are made of.

Now that papa and mamma would talk it over, she felt that her fate was decided; she began to look at her home with homesick eyes, to imagine how the tea-table would appear with one absent, and if she would be missed at prayer, and if papa would pray for "our absent daughter" night and morning. Martyn, Arch, and Trude would be absent also; how strange that while the others were going because they would, she was going because she must.

"Celia wishes to go away awhile that she may earn money," Mrs. Given said to Electa; "but I told her that you had spoken about going away, and that I couldn't spare so many to go away at the same time. But you will not stay long; papa and I are casting about in our minds where to send you; you need a decided change."

Electa had not courage to say, "But I am going that I may earn money, I am not going to visit, or for a little while; it is not to be a pleasure trip, it is the beginning of my life-work."

Whether or not it were a pleasure trip or her life-work, her going would keep Celia at home; so much was gained at that instant; Electa had never felt so happy in her life; none of the others

had done this for Celia, she had done it herself, and Celia needed it to be done.

"Mamma, where do you want to send me?" she asked quietly, with a tumult at her heart.

"Somewhere among our friends, where there is some excitement, and where you can be quiet when you choose. Celia will make a dress for you; we will fix you up as nicely as we can. Papa is sure that God will find for you just the companionship and changes that you need."

And when they were found, she must find the work and the money for herself!

She was going out like Abraham, at the command of God, not knowing whither she would go. How did Abraham know that God was speaking to him? he had not any Bible to find it in. How did people who did not understand the Bible discover what God would have them do? Was there any other way in which God spoke to them?

In these summer days, while papa and mamma were deciding where it was best for Electa, the home child to be sent, Electa the home child, who dreaded more and more inexpressibly to be sent anywhere, passed all her spare hours—morning, noon, and night—in studying the Bible that she might learn how God had revealed His will to them of old time. First He gave a listening heart and then He spoke. She believed that she had the listening heart. I believe it, too.

One afternoon, while sitting alone on a knoll under a maple in the front yard, a doubt came to

her; perhaps God had not spoken to her, perhaps she had no right to seek to know His will in such a manner; she had never read of any one doing such a thing, she would not dare tell any one that she had done it.

In the book on the grass beside her was a torn piece of foolscap, there was a dull lead pencil in her pocket; she took pencil and paper and began to scribble. It was pretty penmanship despite the dull pencil. She wrote rapidly, tucking it confusedly into her pocket when Robin stepped out on the piazza. At night when she was alone she unrolled it and read:

“Waiting before Thee, Lord,
Upon submissive knees,
Waiting to hear Thy word,
To know what Thou dost please;
What Thou wilt have me do
In this sore and narrow strait,
When I am hedged about
With nothing to do but wait.
I will not turn nor stir
To follow my own self-will;
I will wait till Thou dost speak,
I will listen and be still.
Then give me patience, Lord,
To wait what Thou wilt say,
If it but be Thy word,
I will follow it any way.”

During this summer a stranger spoke of Electa as a quaint child. “She is very old-fashioned,” was the reply; “as old-fashioned as Rachel or Rebecca. I met her in the wheat field not long

ago; with her broad hat, her shy face, and long braids she reminded me of Ruth. The other girls are so up to the times, reading all the late books and dressing in the latest style that she *does* appear quaint."

The life that she lived within herself was still more quaint; papa and mamma thought that every day she grew more unlike the others.

"She must go away," they said to each other, "she must get shaken up, she must get outside of herself."

She did not live in The Beehive this summer, nor anywhere in the nineteenth century, but away back among the old heroes of the desert and in Canaan. The old-time stories were wells of living water in her weary land; she drank again and again and yet thirsted for more. Celia, the manager of the family, was not a reader; she read one weekly religious paper and one weekly newspaper to keep up to the times, but seldom gave more than a hasty glance at the late books about the house; and yet it was Celia who instituted a course of reading among the girls this summer. She forced herself to read, that she might forget herself.

Opening "Deerslayer" one afternoon—Arch had left it open upon the back piazza,—she lost herself in it; after the restless days and wakeful nights it was a new experience to forget that she had something to forget. This was the beginning of a course of Cooper. Alluding to it afterward, she called this summer her Cooper summer.

Not to be outdone by the sister who made no pretension to being well-read, Nan took up Shakespeare, and Mollie, Scott's novels; Robin preferred Scott's poems, and Trude asked Martyn to choose from Dickens for her summer reading.

While it was to the others a Cooper summer, a Shakespeare summer, a Scott summer, a Dickens summer, it was to Electa an Old Testament summer. Very rarely she opened the New Testament; not, indeed, until with a new longing she missed the companionship of Jesus Christ. "I am lonely without Him," she thought one day. "I have been missing Him all summer."

At the tea-table the girls amused the younger children and rested papa and mamma by their bright talk of what they had been reading; Electa felt silent, she felt more silent than she seemed, for her listening eyes and appreciative questions were all the inspiration that the talkers needed, and no one noticed her pre-occupation. How could she talk about her own reading? She could speak lightly of Rowena and Rebecca, of Little Nell and Paul Dombey, of Deerslayer and Hetty, but how could she speak before them all of the stories that had moved her heart to tears?—of David asking and finding answer from God through the ephod, of Gideon and his fleece, of Samuel and Moses, of Rebecca and Samson's mother, and all the others who had found God near enough to speak to them.

"What is your 'course of reading,' daughter?"

her father inquired one evening at the tea-table. "Is it Shakspeare, or Milton, or Mrs. Opie, or Jonathan Edwards?"

She colored, hesitating, the truth choking her; she dared not say that she was not reading any thing, she was ashamed to say that she was reading only the Bible.

"Is it a secret?" inquired Arch, "something too deep for our feeble understandings?"

"I suspect that it is nothing less than Hebrew," laughed Robin.

"Not in the original, only an excellent translation," she answered in a relieved tone; thankful for her escape; then chiding herself most unsparingly for her cowardice, not understanding that it was the sacredness of the study and her own deep personal interest in the answer to the question that she was seeking that gave her the shyness and sensitiveness.

"Follow it any way!" she repeated the words to herself night and day. God had premitted her to deceive herself, He had let her do a foolish, if not a wrong thing, in trying to discover His will in a way not according to His will, and now would He punish her and not speak to her at all?

If He did not bid her go, might she stay at home?

But, no; she must go, else Celia would have no excuse for staying. If she might die instead—she was not strong these summer days, she almost forgot that she was born of the will of God.

Oh, morbid child, with morbid fancies, this world is to you just what you are making it. To laughing Robin, who loved God and every body else beside, and who never looked inside of herself to study herself, what a different world it was!

How lovely and wide and cool and full of happy household noises The Beehive was this summer! As lovely as love and happiness could make it; this old, unpainted house, with shutters instead of blinds, with signs of decay from roof to foundation, with wistaria, honeysuckle, and even hop vines and blackberry bushes climbing over and up all the unsightly places in walls, roofs, or fences.

Such a home to go away from! Electa hugged every leaf to her heart, enwrapping herself more and more closely in all the home associations within and without. She did not love to be a martyr; she almost wished that Celia might know what she was giving up for her sake and taking up for her sake. These days must be lived through, these days of her first great sorrow; she went about her few household tasks like one dreaming, doing her work with her hands, with but one thought in her heart, the intense longing to know if God would have her go, and whither, and what the thing was that He would find for her to do. The shining light and the words that she had opened to in the Bible had not been the voice of God; she felt, without understanding the reason, that she had been doing wrong in thus seeking a sign from God; she did not dare again seek any sign.

Abraham's servant had sought, and signs had been granted to the faith of Gideon and Moses and David; angels had been sent from heaven to speak to men when they were in perplexity and doubt; they had spoken plainly, bidding them where to go, even walking with Peter and showing him the way. If an angel would come to her, how she would listen, listen and obey!

But in the study, as she searched among her father's books, there was no rustle of wings; in her own chamber, when upon her knees in prayer, there came no voice nor presence; out in the sunshine, the sky shone blue over her head, there was no parting among the clouds for an angel to come through.

Nowhere in the Bible, nowhere in the world, nowhere from above, beneath, or around her, nowhere from within herself could she discover how it was that God would speak to her.

"I'll do the thing I know," she decided at last, "and then perhaps I'll know more."

This was in October; all the summer through she had fought with herself, she had studied the Bible, praying and struggling; she could do no more—only the thing she knew. God had not yet spoken to her so that she might understand.



IV.

TWO LETTERS.

October was almost gone; Electa was glad to have it go; this summer had been a very unsatisfactory summer to her, nothing had happened, no new thing in her outward life, excepting that she had confessed her faith in Christ at the fall Communion, and no new thing in her inward life, for she had failed in getting any sign from God, and no way was opened for her to go out into the world.

Martyn had entered the theological seminary, Arch had gone to a mercantile college, and Trude was happy at boarding-school. The bills would all come in; those bills were much on Electa's mind. Papa did not act as if they were much on his mind; but often his prayers kept Electa's eyes full all prayer-time.

"Thou hast always provided for us; I know that Thou wilt provide for us now," he said the very morning that the letter came. But the letter did not come until after breakfast, and the talk at the breakfast-table had something to do with Electa's decision.

"There's a gypsy camp down the road a mile," Ned announced at the breakfast-table. "They sell horses, tell fortunes, and sleep out of doors."

"What is 'tell fortunes'?" asked Vail.

"Tell things that's going to happen," returned Ned with the wisdom of two years seniority.

"Tell fortunes!" flashed through Electa's brain.

"I wonder if they could tell me where to go and what to do! Saul went to the witch of Endor, but that was because God refused to speak to him—neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophet."

"Electa looks serious," said Nan. "Would you like to consult the gypsies, and know if you are going on a journey and who you will marry and all such things?"

"I'd like to know if I am going on a journey," she answered, coloring almost painfully.

"God knows, daughter," said papa; "that is His secret, and He will tell you when the time comes."

"He will tell you in time for you to pack up," added Vail; "won't that be time enough?"

"Jennie Hood had hers told," Ned continued.

Celia raised her eyes, with a flash in them.

"And the gypsy said that she would marry a rich man and have plenty of trouble; and Jennie laughed and said that was true; and the gypsy guessed it by the handsome ring on her engagement finger; and of course she would have trouble, for Halstead Seymour is as wild as can be. Celia,

I thought that Halstead Seymour liked to come to see *you*?"

"What else about the gypsy encampment?" asked Mollie quickly, not glancing toward Celia.

"Oh, it is splendid; do you want to go and see? There's a sign on the fence with, 'Power from on High,' painted on it."

"Does that mean that God tells the gypsies what's going to happen, papa?" asked Vail.

"God never tells any one what is going to happen, my little boy, unless He has a special reason for making it known to him; He made the future known in olden times to His prophets, but nowadays we must wait till God brings events to pass. That sign is most wicked and blasphemous; I will go out after breakfast and see what can be done about it."

"Then how can people know what's going to happen?" inquired Ned.

"They can not know; they do not need to know; only God knows what is laid up for us in to-morrow. To-day He is giving to us; to-morrow is His own to keep until to-morrow comes."

"Don't you know any thing that's going to happen to us?" persisted Vail.

"Yes; I could tell you all some of the things that are laid up for you."

"Oh, do, do," cried Robin eagerly; "tell us our fortunes, papa; tell us if we shall have the things that we wish for most."

"I can tell you that, too," he answered gravely.

"Well, begin with Celia, then," said Nan; "don't tell mamma's, because she has all hera."

"Mamma found a part of hers at Patty Westlake's twenty-seven years ago this summer; she went to comfort the old ladies and found me and comforted me."

"Did she know that she was going to get you there?" asked Vail.

"No, nobody knew; there was no prophet to tell us. But when God has the care of us, each step means something. The mistake of a word in the direction of a letter snatched a king out of the jaws of death once upon a time. That mistake was a part of that king's fortune."

"And the man that wrote the letter made a part of the king's fortune," said Vail; "perhaps we'll get a letter to-day that will be a part of some one's fortune."

"Mamma's fortune is in thirteen parts," said Electa, "and she is a part of thirteen fortunes."

"You are each a part of each other's fortune," said papa; "and probably each a part of some one's fortune whom you have yet to meet."

"Send us to Patty Westlake's, mamma," said Robin.

"I am anxious about the old ladies," returned mamma; "my last letter has remained unanswered for several months. They live so alone that they could both die and no one be the wiser for some time. They keep the blinds closed, and the house is surrounded by a high brick wall that their father built, and the neighbors never see them;

the butcher, the baker, and the grocer go around to the back door once every two weeks. Jane gives the orders through a half opened door; the minister calls sometimes, and once in a great while is granted admission; the neighbors are wearied with trying to be kind to them; they have lived that hermit life for over thirty years!"

"I wouldn't go to see them for the world," exclaimed Robin, "not even to find somebody like you, papa."

"I would," said Electa.

"They love each other, but they hate the world," continued mamma; "they both had a disappointment when they were young, and they have hated the world ever since; their father died thirty years since; Patty was born in that house, she has lived there eighty-four years."

"I like this house better," said Vail; "don't go, Electa."

"I don't expect to; but I *could* if I had to."

"But, papa, you haven't told our fortunes," said Nan.

"Then I will; listen, all of you; you may all have blessed fortunes; if you are willing and obedient, you will be blessed and be made a blessing in this world and in the next world; but if you are unwilling and disobedient, you will be cursed and be made a cursing. You may all have what you want most, if you want something that is according to God's will, and ask Him for it in the spirit and in the name of Jesus."

"But suppose that it isn't according to His will?" said Mollie.

"Then the worst thing that can befall you is to have it."

Electa shivered at her father's words and tone. It became ever afterward a terrible thing to her for one to have a thing that God did not wish them to have.

"But, papa," said Nan, "you don't know the things that will happen to us."

"I know that they will be things of your own making, things of your own choosing, things of your own seeking, many of them things that you may hinder if you will. To-morrow is to-day's future, what you hoped for, prayed for, worked for, what you did not hinder yesterday is happening to-day. The command was once, 'Sanctify yourselves—to-morrow the Lord will do wonders.' Now, children all, if you wish your to-morrow to be wonderful, sanctify yourselves to-day."

"How?" asked Electa eagerly.

She was longing for a wonderful to-morrow.

"By setting yourself apart *from* all that He hates and *to* all that He loves, receive His Holy Spirit; He is ready to give it; be willing and obedient, and then God can give you all He will, and do in you and do for you all He will. And, then," said papa, rising and lifting his hands in benediction as he looked around upon the bright, young, eager faces, "what a wonderful fortune you will have, all my children!"

"I will take it," said Electa to herself as sol-

emly as though she were speaking to God. She slipped her napkin into its ring, feeling as though her wonderful future had already begun.

That morning a letter came to The Beehive that had been written three months since; Jane Westlake had written it one morning intending to give it, to be mailed, to the butcher the next time that he called, and had laid it away in the china closet on the top shelf behind a platter, and had wondered all the three months why the answer had not been received. Three mornings since, having occasion to go to the china closet, by some law of association the forgotten letter was brought to her mind, and she had taken it to the post-office herself.

The girls and Vail huddled around their mother, while she read it aloud; it was written in a fine, cramped hand, and ran thus:

"MY DEAR COUSIN:—I take my pen in hand to inform you that Patty and I are as well as can be expected, and hope that you and all your family are the same.

"Patty is getting queer-like, and is too great a burden for me alone, and I want one of your girls to come and help me; I want one that is patient and pleasant in her ways and handy, and I will give her one hundred dollars if she will stay six months without going home. My respects to the minister and all your family.

"Yours respectfully,

"JANE ANN WESTLAKE."

"Well, I must say!" exclaimed Nan.

"If that isn't cool!" cried Mollie.

"She had better take me," said Robin, "I am so patient and handy!"

"One hundred dollars for six months in that dungeon!" said Celia.

"They never light a lamp, they go to bed before dark, and, oh, the rats!" said Mollie. "I stayed there a week once, and came home to die. I wouldn't stay there for a hundred dollars a day."

"The poor old bodies need a young life in the house," said mamma, "think what one of you girls would be to them."

"Can I go?" asked Vail, looking troubled; "can't I go and be a blessing to them?"

"No, you blessed boy!" said Celia; "we want you at home."

Electa was standing at her mother's side with her hand upon her shoulder.

"I'll go, mamma," she said quietly.

"And go to bed in the dark, and be eaten up by the rats!" exclaimed Vail. "Oh, 'Lecta, how can you stand it?"

"You are the last one to go," said Nan, "any of us can better go than you."

"Think of her in that dungeon, Celia!" said Robin; "no, our little one isn't going; we'll send somebody stout, and brave, and strong."

"But I *want* to go," answered Electa decidedly. "I have been getting ready to go all summer."

"Did you know you were going?" asked Vail, "did somebody tell you?"

"She doesn't know it yet," said Celia.

"I'd think of Baby going as soon as you," said Mollie.

"But I *want* to go," she persisted.

"You haven't tried it yet, child," said her mother; "if we let you go, you must promise to come home if you are too homesick. I can not feel that this is the place meant for you, but it may be, after all."

"And you may find something wonderful," consoled Robin, "wonderful things don't seem to come to The Beehive; we must all go out into the world to seek our fortune."

"Isn't Mr. Ryle somewhere near there?" asked Celia.

"I would feel safe to have her near him," said mamma.

"She don't deserve it," said Mollie; "she wouldn't come in to see him, and she ran away from him."

"He is settled at Swanzey, three miles from Cousin Jane's," said mamma; "he called there last summer, but was not admitted."

"Is their post-office at Swanzey?" asked Electa.

"No, it is two miles nearer, at Walnut Grove; their father used to attend church at Walnut Grove, but they never go anywhere," answered mamma.

"O, Electa, don't go!" cried Vail, "suppose it kills you. Do you like the high walls? And the rats!"

"Perhaps they need me," said Electa slowly, "they need somebody, and perhaps it's me."

"You'll be a martyr if you go," said Vail.

"Or a missionary," added Mollie.

"What *do* you want to go for?" asked Nan impatiently.

"She hasn't gone yet," said mamma; "one of you girls write to-day; her letter is three months old—"

"It isn't three months old on the envelope," said Electa taking the coarse yellow envelope from her mother's hand. "Are they very poor, mamma?"

"Not at all poor, they have a good income, larger than papa's salary, and they own the house and land; the income dies with them, I believe; their own savings must amount to something by this time—"

"Now I know what they want somebody for," cried Mollie. "Electa, you will be an heiress."

"Can they give the house and land away?" asked Vail. "I want Electa to have that."

"Yes; Patty owns the house and land."

"I'm sorry I know about that," said Electa "but perhaps they may not like me; I don't want to go for reward."

"You can give them to me," suggested Vail. "Will you, Electa?"

"Suppose we forget that they have money," said mamma, "and think of them as two poor, unhappy disciples of our Lord, who need a little of His sunshine; they have wilfully thrown away their op-

portunities and blessings, and now in their childless old age they long for a child in the house. I confess that I don't want to spare any of mine."

"Perhaps Jennie Hood would go, or Susie Prentiss," suggested Vail.

"We might find a homeless and motherless girl who would count that home a thought of God for her," said mamma, "one who needs them as much as they need her."

"Perhaps they wouldn't like a stranger," said Celia, "they may want some one near of kin, although they have never seen her."

"I *want* to go," said Electa, "perhaps they need just me."

"Perhaps they do, and so do I," said mamma, drawing the flushed face down to her lips. "Think over it, child; pray over it, and papa and I will do the same. One of you write to-day and say that we will consider the matter."

"I'll write," said Electa, "and may I say if any ones goes that I am the one?"

"I don't know," laughed Robin, "the house and land and the rats almost move me to go."

"I won't go," said Nan.

"Neither will I," said Mollie, "and Celia shan't."

"I'll go with Electa," said Vail; "may I, mamma?"

"No, dear; you must live in the sunshine."

"So must Electa," said he.

"Electa can find enough for her, but not enough for two," said Mollie.

"May I do as I like with the money?" asked Electa eagerly.

"I think that you will have earned it, child," said Celia.

"May I, mamma?" asked Electa.

"Yes, just as you like," said mamma; "but, oh, my little daughter, how can I let you go?"

"That is your part of the giving," said Celia.

"I feel very selfish, mamma," she added. "I want to stay home near you."

"I am very selfish," said mamma, "I want you all near me, my little flock."

"Are all their children dead?" asked Vail.

"Children dead," echoed Guy, climbing into his mother's lap.

"No; they never had any; their mother died seventy years ago, when they were both little girls; they were wild, gay girls, fond of society, and their father let them have their own way; that old brick house used to be full of light from attic to basement; but Patty met with a disappointment that soured her towards all mankind, and Jane felt in all things, with her sister; so they shut themselves up years and years ago, and now, poor things, their life is gone and all their blessed opportunities. They were cousins of my mother. She visited the old house when it was alive. It is full of old things, Electa, if that will comfort you any."

"I would rather find some young things in it," said Electa.

"You will not find any books," said Celia.

"I'll take all my favorites, and perhaps I'll write a book myself," returned Electa lightly.

"If you decide to go—and I don't know what to hope about it," said mamma, "I'll write myself to Mr. Ryle; I would like to have you under his guardianship."

"Do you know what you will do with your money?" asked Vail; "whisper it to me, I'll never tell."

"No, it is my own secret. Let me see how long I must stay if I go the last day of October! November, December, January, February, March, April! Oh, deary, deary me! I shan't see you all till the first of May. Will you write each of you once a week? Promise, Celia."

"Yes, I promise."

"You, Nan?"

"Yes, I promise."

"And you, Mollie?"

"Yes, I promise."

"Not all in one sheet, but four separate letters! Do you promise, Robin?"

"Yes, I promise, too."

"And mamma once in a while?"

"Yes, dear, you shall be kept in letters. Arch and Martyn and Trude will not forget you, either."

"Four days every week I shall certainly have a letter! Oh," with a long breath, "how I shall look forward to the mail. It will keep me alive."

"I will ask Mr. Ryle to see that you get your

letters!" said mamma. "Oh, child, what a winter it will be to you."

"She isn't gone yet," cried Vail, clinging to her; "I need you, 'Lecta."

"What are you going for?" asked Guy.

Electa wondered if she knew herself; to help Trude, to keep Celia at home, and because the old ladies needed her were all the reasons that presented themselves without seeking for them.

"What for? Oh, because I want to."

"Think about it, and pray about it," mamma had said; she would do that with all her mind and heart. She must decide for herself, no one would help her decide. She wrote a long letter to Cousin Jane; it was easy to write herself out to her, because she had never seen her and therefore did not feel shy with her. Cousin Jane was like some one in a book; not as real as some people in books were to her. She could not show the letter to any one, it was too full of herself. It satisfied her sense of justice that Cousin Jane should know all about herself before she engaged her. She felt that she was to work for money, that she must satisfy her employer and work for wages. It would have been a very different letter had she known that other eyes beside Jane's and Patty's would see it; she forgot that she was writing for old eyes, eyes unused to the later style of penmanship.

"How very beautiful," Mr. Ryle exclaimed when Miss Jane handed him the letter and asked him

to read it aloud. And this is the long letter that Mr. Ryle read aloud to the old ladies, and then remembered to tell his blind mother about it that evening.

“*The Beehive*, Oct. 17, 18—.

“MY DEAR COUSIN JANE:—Your letter is dated three months ago, so I know that you were thinking about one of us then, and it was about that time that I began to wish to go somewhere. The other girls have decided that they can not accept your offer, so if any one does accept it, it will be I. As papa and mamma need some time to think about it and pray about it, I can not give you their decision to-day. I shall think about it and pray about it, too. It would be very good for you if Celia could come to you; she is always bright (which I am not), and her voice sounds as if she were never worried about any thing. But mamma and the girls can not live without her, for next to mamma, she is the head of the house. She is our other mother. It would do you good just to feel that she was in the house. Nan comes next (her real name is Anna). I wish that you could have her; she is pretty (which I am not), and she likes to make herself look pretty. She talks a great deal of nonsense and would keep you laughing, and she is as sweet as trailing arbutus. She doesn't want to leave home, she can't be spared; Howard Drane comes twice a week to see her, and, of course, she can't go far away from him. He is a farmer and the leader of our choir. Nan

wants to marry a senator, so Howard says that he will try to be one. I like to tell you about the girls, because your heart must ache so to know about girls. Papa calls us a bouquet; Celia, he calls tansy, Nan is a white rose, Mollie is heliotrope, Robin is an apple blossom, Trude is rose-geranium, and I am a white pink.

"I wonder if you love flowers and would let me have a flower garden? But, oh, I forgot, it will be winter. I would be so much obliged if you would let me have some plants. In winter our sitting-room is almost a conservatory, and I should miss it so much. Mollie and Martyn are twins; Martyn is at the seminary studying to be a minister, and Mollie is to keep house for him some day. Mollie is such a darling (which I am not), and you would so love to have her. I am sorry for your sakes that there is no one to come but me. And Robin is just like a robin (her real name is Grace), she laughs and says sweet things all day long, and never gets anxious about herself as I do about myself. But she has been a Christian longer than I have. I only joined the Church this fall. I was afraid to before; I am very afraid of things. Trude has gone to Bethlehem to school, so of course she couldn't come if she wanted to. She is two years younger than I am. She is fifteen. Robin is two years older than I am. She is nineteen. Mollie is twenty-one, Nan is twenty-three, and Celia is twenty-five. I know that you would like to have some one older than I. It will

take me a long time to grow up. Papa says that I am more of a child than Trude (her name is Gertrude). My name is Electa, that means *chosen*. Isn't it beautiful? I want to be chosen. But perhaps you will not choose me. If you do not, mamma may find some one in the village that you would like better. I hope that you have a melodeon or an organ, for I shall be very homesick without music. I haven't told you about the boys, because I suppose that you don't care for boys. Our boys are as lovely as girls, though.

"Arch is fourteen (his real name is Archibald); he has gone away to learn to do business. Vail is nine (his real name is John Vail). I wish that you could see him. You would want him if you could see him. He has the loveliest eyes with the loveliest long lashes, and he beats us all in playing games, and when he sings his voice is as rich and full as an organ. You would wonder at that if you could see him, for he is so short and slight that Mr. Ryle (he is a minister near you) thought that he was only seven. He never was strong, and he is more of a baby than Guy, who is five. Ned is eleven (his real name is Jonathan Edwards), and he is a bundle of fun. And then there's the baby. We call him Baby, but his real name is Wilberforce. I hope that it doesn't make you lonesome to hear about us all; I wish that you had a house full of boys and girls.

"I shall try not to be homesick, because I want a hundred dollars very much. Mamma

says that I may do just what I please with it. You needn't fear that I shall waste it. I don't think that I am so very handy, but I do like to take care of sick people; I often go to see sick people and old people; there's a bed-ridden woman in the village, and an old man ninety-three, and a crippled child, in the village that I visit very often. If I owned your house, I would open all the blinds and let the sunshine in, and then bring all the sick children that I could find into it, all the lame ones especially. I think that I ought to tell you that I am lame; so, now perhaps you will not want me. I can go up and down stairs pretty fast, though. I don't use crutches. I am not so lame as that. Don't be afraid of wounding my feelings by saying that you would prefer to have some one else, for I should think you would. I would if I were you. Perhaps Susie Prentiss can come, her mother is a widow and works hard, and they have a wild, lazy, big brother to take care of. Don't you want two girls? I should think that you would want six. How have you lived so long without any girls?

"I want to go to church every Sunday, but I don't know how I can walk two miles, or even one through the snow; and down there in Massachusetts it is colder than it is here. I want to go to Mr. Ryle's church. I have never seen him, but I heard him pray once; he prayed for me, and the prayer is being answered. And I must go to the post-office every day, for I shal certainly die without

my letters. And I want some one to sleep in the room next to mine; I never do sleep alone, and I don't know what I shall do about that. I don't know what I shall do about a good many things.

"I am not brave. I am afraid that you will not like me. Even if you don't, I am glad that I have written this letter. If you don't like me and I don't come, I will write to you once in a while and tell you about things. I will tell you about the world we live in, it is such a full, happy world, and it makes me so sorry for your shut-up, silent house. I will certainly come if you need me, and do the best I can, although I am not Celia nor Nan nor Mollie nor Trude, but only

"*ELECTA.*"

She put the letter into the envelope without looking over it, sealed and stamped it, and placed it on the sitting-room mantel, behind a vase of wild flowers. All through the day she glanced towards it; how much it meant to her no human being could understand. If she might only open the Bible and find written there in plain English letters, "Go to Cousin Jane's," or "Do not go to Cousin Jane's," how relieved and satisfied she would be! But then the Bible would be a very queer Bible; that text would mean something for her, and for no one beside; she could not expect God to write a Bible only for her. But oh, how she did wish that He would! How easy and safe it would be to open the Bible—*her* Bible—in the

morning and find her day all mapped out for her; to find every thing, as plain as—

“Rise at six.

“Put on a blue cambric wrapper.

“Talk to papa before breakfast.

“Talk about books or people at the breakfast-table.

“Put your room in order.

“Write in your journal.

“Amuse Vail.

“Call on some sick person.

“Sew for mamma.

“Dust the study.”

And so through every hour of the day she would know just what to do; and if she were always obeying, she never could be disobeying.

God *could* speak to her as plainly as that. He was so merciful and tender-hearted, and so anxious for her to do right, that it did seem queer that He had not made the right thing plainer.

Papa never seemed troubled; did he always know what to do?

Six months, six weary, dreary months! Not only to be away from them all, but to be in such a place, a prison, a tomb, with no one that loved her close by.

“Mamma,” she said, finding her mother alone in the back porch, “mamma, what shall I do?”

“You must decide for yourself, my dear.”

“Won’t you help me?”

“No.”

"Talk it over to me."

"I think that you are capable of talking it over to yourself."

"Do you think it right for me to go?"

"Yes."

"Do you think it right for me not to go?"

"Yes."

"Isn't one thing more right than the other?"

"One course is more unselfish than the other."

"I know which is the unselfish course," sighed Electa; "it isn't as bad as leaving heaven to come down to the earth, is it?"

"Not quite," said Mrs. Given, smiling; "this is an opportunity for you to do a self-denying thing; you may have your choice."

"Who gives me the choice?" questioned Electa quickly.

"Who gives us all our choices every day?"

"Mamma, I don't mean to be wicked, but I do wish that He hadn't given me this choice?"

"Are you praying 'may Thy will be undone?'"

"Oh, no, no!" she exclaimed earnestly; "but, mamma, the others do not think that they have a choice."

"Then why do you?"

"I can't help it; I must, I have to," Electa said energetically.

"Then, child, choose."

"Perhaps papa will decide for me."

"Ask him, I have just been talking to him about it."

Papa was in the study. Electa opened the door, and stood full five minutes on the threshold before he became aware of her presence.

"Well, daughter," he said, looking up.

"Papa, do you think I am the one to go to Còusin Jane's to do them good?"

"I don't know."

"I don't know, either."

"Can't you find out?"

"No, sir; there isn't any way."

"Then it is not required of you," replied her father, opening another book.

"Papa, *why* won't you help me decide?"

"Yesterday—come sit on my knee—"

Electa was not yet too big a girl to nestle in her father's arms like a baby; he smoothed her hair and kissed her forehead, she crept closer, hiding her head on his shoulder.

"Yesterday I called upon Mrs. Tate; they keep summer boarders. On the piazza sat a lady doing nothing seemingly but watch a handsome, three-year-old boy who was playing on the piazza; on the upper step of the piazza sat a trim Irish girl, she was doing nothing beside watch this boy. If he ventured near the edge of the piazza four hands were outstretched to hold him back; he was not allowed to descend the steps alone, or to walk down the path alone; they did not allow him to walk the length of the hall unless one of them were close beside him."

"Was he very sick?"

"No."

"Nor lame?"

"No."

"He was blind, then."

"He is the handsomest child I ever saw, in perfect health, perfectly developed; he spoke to me with the air of a little prince."

"Then what was the matter with him?"

"The matter was with his mother. In all his life he has never waited upon himself or taken one step by himself or decided any thing for himself. His mother is afraid that he will get hurt."

"Your children will never be like that, papa," said Electa, raising her head to look at him and smile.

"You desire to be. But God isn't willing. Mamma and I are not willing."

"But you can advise me, papa," she pleaded.

"I advise you to think about it and pray about it; use your knowledge, your reason, your faith, asking God to move you, not only to will but to *do* His good pleasure."

She lay back again with her head on his shoulder and both arms around his neck. For six long months she could not sit in her father's lap!

"I should not choose such a home for you, daughter; I am not wise enough to choose a home like that for you. Any day you are at liberty to return, you know."

"I'll stay it out if I go," she said decidedly.

"Perhaps you will, perhaps you will not. You will do as God bids you."

"That's just it. He doesn't seem to bid me."

"‘I was in prison and ye came unto Me.’ They are in a prison of their own building, they have barred themselves in."

She kissed him slowly, loosened her arms, arose, and went out. She had decided to go. She had decided to go, if they would receive her. She decided with the tears chasing each other down her cheeks. She could do this hard thing for the sake of Jesus; she could not do it for them, nor for Trude. Those words—she found them and read them again and again: "*I was in prison and ye came unto Me.*" They were better, oh, how much better than, "Go to Cousin Jane's."

It might be that this Bible was just for her, if she could receive it. But she would not announce her decision until Cousin Jane had replied to her letter.

Ned took her letter to the post-office that afternoon, and with the pile of letters that he brought back was one that raised more of a commotion than Cousin Jane's had done.

Again the girls huddled around their mother to listen while she read it aloud. This letter was written in a stylish, running hand upon perfumed paper stamped with a monogram in crimson and gold. The words were few, but most cordial. Could Cousin Henrietta part with one of her girls for the winter? They were planning to spend the winter at a hotel in Washington, and since Netta's marriage and departure for Europe they were so heart-broken that they must have another daughter,

they could not live without a girl about them. If Cousin Henrietta would not take it amiss, they would prefer to furnish her wardrobe and supply her spending-money as well as to take care of all other expenses, and then would consider themselves indebted to her.

"Oh, how splendid!" shouted Robin, clapping her hands.

"It's just too delightful!" cried Mollie, catching Nan and beginning to dance around with her.

"We'll all go—every one of us," said Nan.

"I won't," said Celia. "I know that she doesn't want me."

"She's a lovely woman," said Mrs. Given; "I can trust any of my girls with Cousin Jennie."

"I won't go," said Electa.

"And Trude can't," said Robin; "we three will decide among ourselves."

"I think that she has chosen," said mamma, turning the page.

"Oh, isn't it I?" cried Mollie.

"Or I?" repeated Nan.

"I know it is I," said Robin; "she said that she liked to hear me sing."

"She said that she liked to look at me," laughed Nan.

"She said that I always reminded her of Netta," said Mollie.

"I expect that it is Electa," declared Robin; "it is always the youngest in story-books. Tell us, mamma, we will bear it."

"In one day I am asked to give up two of my flock," said mamma; "suppose that I will not let any of you go?"

"I know you will, you dear, blessed, beautiful mamma," cried Robin; "not to Cousin Jane's of course, but it is different to go with Cousin Jennie. I hope that she has chosen me, for then it will not be selfish for me to go."

"Of course it won't be," said Nan; "we wouldn't go unless we were chosen. You dear, provoking mamma, how you prolong our agony! Is it the youngest and fairest and sweetest? Is it Cinderella? Is it Electa, our down-trodden, oppressed Electa, who will marry a prince and ride over all our heads?"

"Would you like to go?" asked Vail, squeezing himself in among them.

"With Cousin Jennie? Yes, I think I would," said Electa, thinking of the shut-up house and the quiet old ladies.

"Is it Electa?" asked Robin nervously.

"No, it isn't Electa," answered mamma.

"Is it I?" queried Celia, laughing. "I would like to see what can take me away from The Beehive *this* winter!"

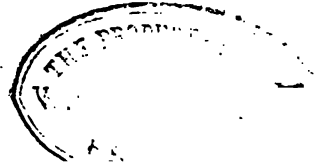
"It isn't Celia," said mamma, "it isn't Nan—" Nan colored and tried to laugh.

"It isn't Trude—it isn't Mollie—"

"Then it is I. It is I!" cried Robin, seizing Vail and dancing him around the room.

"O, rare and happy fortune that cometh thus to

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me—do go on, girls! I know it isn't selfish in me, for if I am chosen the rest of you wouldn't go for any thing. And I didn't choose myself. I never thought of such a thing. I never thought of such a thing happening to me."

"Don't you want time to think?" asked Electa.

"I have thought, I am thinking now, I am thinking all the time. Won't I write you the loveliest, longest letters? Let me see the letter, mamma. Shall I answer it?"

"We will talk to papa first."

"He will let me decide, I know; he always does when it is a thing like this—between two right things, he always lets us decide. And this is so beautiful and right. Mamma, don't you see that the world can't do without your girls?"

"Who'll be left?" asked Vail gravely.

"Plenty," said Robin, "only—let me see—Arch and Martyn and Trude and Electa and I gone—only five, not half of us."

"Perhaps we'll have a letter to-morrow for somebody else to go," said Vail. "I won't go, anywhere, that's decided. Nobody shall get me away from this Beehive."

Electa echoed the words to herself: "Nobody shall get me away from this Beehive." That night she lay awake thinking of the winter days and winter nights that were coming; not only to miss them all, but to miss the talkative breakfast times, and the gathering together at tea-time when each had a story of the day's experience to relate, or a

question to ask, or a bit of news about somebody, and then the bright ending to the bright day, the fire on the sitting-room hearth, and games and stories, and reading aloud, and singing, and prayer-time, and good-night kisses, and the last talk at night in somebody's chamber, and all the friends, and all the village, and oh! how lonely it would be not to hear papa preach. It would be sorrowful and homesick enough if she were going with Cousin Jennie, but the desolate house and closed shutters and no evenings—how could she choose to go? “I was in prison and ye came unto Me,” but it did not say “came and lived with me.” Christ came down and lived on the earth though, leaving His Father and the glory that He had with Him before the world was. He was rich and He became poor; and she would not become poor; her home would be comfortable, if a home could be comfortable without any love or light in it. Ten thousand dollars would not repay her if she needed the money for her herself, but she wanted this for Trude, for Trude who was fast asleep this minute without a trouble in the world. She could live through it, it would not kill her, and if it did she would come home to die. If papa or mamma could have a shadow of her distress they would insist that she should not go, but no one should know; it was blessed to be needed somewhere, at last. She was glad that Robin was going out into the world so differently. She would take “Mrs. Hemans” with her and “Tupper” and “Adelaide Proc-

tor" and all her old school-books and a new blank-book for a journal, and a half ream of commercial note, and how many postage stamps? She would certainly write one letter every day; there were thirty days in November—but the money! Must she deduct it from her hundred dollars? She wanted to give mamma the unbroken hundred; but she would need shoes and a winter bonnet and—oh, dear, if she bought her own things how little she would have left to pay Trude's bills! What would be gained, after all? Hardly any thing beside helping the two old ladies who needed her. "I was in prison—in prison—in prison—" she moaned and then God comforted her with sleep.



V.

SUSPENSE.

A week passed bringing no word from Cousin Jane. Did the silence augur her pleasure or displeasure? It might be, after all, that she need not go; if Cousin Jane would not receive her, then God had not accepted her sacrifice; it was not, it could not be, a cheerful offering, how could He accept it? Perhaps, instead, she might find some happy thing to do, something as happy as Robin's. Robin's happiness had come to her so easily, and she herself had pulled and tugged with all her strength to find hers, and it seemed to be a misery instead of a happiness. Robin went singing about the house all day, while she could scarcely speak a bright word and was exerting herself every hour to keep back homesick tears. Becoming restless with suspense one afternoon towards sunset, she took her hat upon her arm and went out. Vail stood leaning against the gate post with a bunch of feathers in his hand.

"I've found the loveliest one!" he exclaimed, turning towards her, "one side is all gray the other all brown; I never saw any thing like it."

For five years Vail had been collecting feathers; his enthusiasm never waned; one of the old topics in family council was to question the reason of his love for them, one insisting that it was the variety of color, another the softness and delicacy of material. At one time he was never without a feather in his hand; he had not very long been too big a boy to carry a feather to church.

"It is pretty," she answered, taking it into her hand.

"May I go with you, please?"

"Not to-night; I want to be alone by myself."

"Don't go where the gypsies are."

"I'm not afraid."

"Electa," following her and holding her back, "what should we do if God wasn't living?"

"We shouldn't do at all; we shouldn't be alive."

"Can't He ever die?" he questioned anxiously.

"No, never die."

"Tell me something funny, the funniest thing you know."

"You are the funniest thing I know," she answered laughing; "do let me go, and you think about feathers."

He released her reluctantly; he was full of thoughts to-day and wanted to talk them out to somebody.

"Has Queen Victoria as much power as the chess queen?" he asked.

"Ask papa."

"Why can't I go with you, 'Lecta? You'll think

of how you refused me, when you can't have me," he added pathetically.

"Then I'll write you a letter and say I'm sorry," she said, smiling at his wheedling tone.

"Good-by," he called after her.

"Good-by," she returned, thinking how lonely it would be not to have any one to say good-by to her.

Every hour, every moment there would be something to miss. She began to feel how much she was giving up.

From her earliest childhood Electa had been the one among the children "to give up."

At first it had only been the roundest and rosiest apple, the little chair that she liked best, the seat next to papa or mamma, the staying at home that another might have a place in the carriage, the book that she was reading or a shade of ribbon that she had set her childish heart upon; but now, at seventeen, making no more ado about it than she had about the book or apple, she was giving up, for six long months, every thing that she loved on earth, every thing and every body.

"The child seems anxious to go," mamma said to papa.

"Electa is the queerest girl," the girls said to each other. So nobody knew and nobody guessed.

"I hope she won't get queer among those old ladies," said Celia.

"I know she'll come home in cap and spectacles," said Robin.

"How will *you* come home, daughter?" her father had asked; "don't learn to love nonsense."

Electa did not know that any one thought about her going; her plan was such a little, old-fashioned affair while Robin's was startling, delightful and bewildering to the home child.

Following the overgrown path along the wayside, stooping now and then to pick a spray of late golden rod or to gather a cluster of bright leaves, her thoughts, meanwhile, upon the one thought of what the mail might bring, she sauntered for half a mile, then stopped before a white gate and laid her hand upon the latch. The grass plat was smooth and very green, a box-bordered, paved path led up to the open front door, upon the rustic porch a lady in a wooden rocker sat sewing.

"Here she is, Susie," the lady called to some one within; "here's the somebody you've been wishing for. Good evening, Electa; come in."

"Not to-night, thank you," said Electa; "I came out to meet Ned as he comes from the mail."

"But Susie has been wishing for somebody and you must come in."

A slight figure in pink calico danced out upon the porch. "O, Electa!" she cried.

Electa could not resist the tone.

Susie flew down the path to meet her, linking her arm within Electa's.

"Come around to the kitchen door," she whispered, "I've so been hoping that you would come to-night."

"What for? Is any thing to happen?"

"Yes; I want to do something and I'm afraid to do it alone."

"I shall not be very much help."

"Yes, you will. I only want you to be with me."

A broad stone formed the kitchen doorstep, Electa stepped upon it and stood looking into the cosy kitchen. If Cousin Jane's kitchen were only as neat and cosy as that! What Cousin Jane's kitchen might be she dared not imagine.

"Stand here a moment," said Susie. "It's a secret, promise not to tell."

"I don't want to promise."

"Well you won't tell, I know."

Susie crossed the kitchen and opened a closet door; taking down the tea canister she poured about a cupful of tea into a small, white paper bag, then opening the sugar box she filled another paper bag half full of sugar; upon the top shelf wrapped in a brown paper were eleven sperm candles, she reached them, standing on tip-toe, counted them twice, then selected two, and replaced the others; she rolled these two together in a piece of newspaper, laid the three parcels upon the table, and stood considering with her finger upon her lip. She was a year younger than Electa, a fresh, pretty girl, with innocent eyes and pouting, self-willed lips.

"That will do!" she exclaimed half aloud.

"Are you playing Lady Bountiful?" asked Electa, standing upon the threshold.

"Yes, said Susie, laughing uncomfortably. "Oh, I forgot, I want a bar of soap."

The soap was in the store-room, a poor little store-room, and there were but four bars, piled one above the others on an old chair. Susie lifted one and looked at it; there were but three left, her mother would certainly miss one out of four. But the old gypsy woman had spoken of soap, she must take the soap or give up her plan altogether.

A flushed face with down-cast eyes and uncertain lips met Electa's eyes as Susie went out to her.

"I'll take the candles and soap," she said hurriedly, "you take the tea and sugar, Electa."

"Very well," assented Electa, "are they for old Mrs. Truax, or her seventy grandchildren?"

"Seventy grandchildren!" repeated Susie.

"This will hardly go around," laughed Electa; "who are they for, Susie?"

"I'll tell you; don't speak so loud," cautioned Susie, taking a broad-brimmed hat from its nail. "I'll wear this hat, and we'll go out the gate and across lots."

"Then I shall miss Ned," thought Electa, hesitatingly taking the sugar and tea from Susie's hand.

They went down the path, through a rickety gateway, and across a field of corn stubble.

"Where are you going, Susie? This isn't the way to Mrs. Truax's," said Electa, pausing in her tiresome walk.

"I'm not going there," answered Susie shortly; "I suppose I must tell you."

Electa went on a few steps till she came to a rail fence, she threw herself wearily against it, leaning back against a slanting post.

Susie stooped to pull a weed, speaking as she stooped, with her face turned away from Electa.

"They are for the old gypsy woman."

"She shan't have them!" cried Electa; "your mother works too hard to support an old, idle, wicked woman, Susie Prentiss."

"Mother doesn't know it," faltered Susie, straightening herself and tossing away the weed. "She asked me for them. I told her that I had no money, and she said that she would take things."

"What for?" questioned Electa sharply.

"To pay her for telling my fortune," said Susie humbly.

Electa drew herself up without a word, Susie did not raise her eyes to meet the look of anger and sorrow and surprise that she could feel from head to foot.

"You steal from your dear, hard-working mother to give to that wicked woman to do a shameful thing for you!"

"I haven't any money, and if I asked mother, she would ask me what I wanted to do with it; so what else could I do?" cried Susie with a frightened sob.

"Give me the soap and candles," commanded Electa, laying her hand on Susie's shoulder.

"What for?" asked Susie poutingly.

"I'll take them back to where you took them from! I'd rather die than do such a mean thing! O, Susie I didn't think it of you!"

"Well, I'll take them back. I'll have to if you won't go with me; but I did want my fortune told," said Susie petulantly; "I don't see the harm."

"In stealing from your mother?"

"Yes; that *is* mean," confessed Susie, in a relieved tone. "I did feel mean all the time; I have felt mean ever since I promised the gypsy." She laid her hand on Electa's arm, but Electa shook it off.

"Don't touch me; I'm too angry with you."

"I'll walk close to you, then," said Susie, half-laughing as they turned towards home. "I'm as frightened as I can be. She has an awful look, and lives in a dark tent, and covers herself with red stuff, and she swears. Why is it wicked to have your fortune told, Electa?"

"So you think it is wicked?" said Electa, penitently taking Susie's hand and drawing it through her arm. "I didn't mean to be so harsh, but I am so shocked."

"Is it wicked? Why is it wicked?" asked Susie.

"Papa told me yesterday. What is your *fortune*?"

"Things that are going to happen to us."

"Who makes things happen?"

Susie hesitated. She felt too wicked to take

God's holy name upon her lips; in a hushed tone she replied, "God."

"Then how does any one beside God know what will happen?"

"I don't know," said Susie, holding her soap and candles uneasily.

"Nobody can know but God."

"But He can tell somebody."

"Do you want Him to tell that wicked woman that swears what He has laid up to happen to you?"

"No," said Susie, with a sob in her throat.

"Do you believe that He has told her?"

"No—I—don't—really."

"Papa says that He will tell us when the time comes."

"It would be fun to know to-night," said Susie.

"God doesn't make things happen just for fun," said Electa, as sternly as her father would have spoken; "what I want to know is what I must *do*, not what will happen to me."

"How do you mean *do*?" asked Susie, perplexed.

"Oh, right things to do,—how to make choices. You chose whether to go to the gypsy or not, and you chose to go. You chose whether to steal or not, and you stole, and then you would have had to cover it with a lie. See how many bad things you chose to do. Your mother is such a dear mamma, too. O, Susie, how could you?"

"I don't know how I could, I'm sure," sobbed Susie, as frightened as she could be. "Perhaps she would have foretold something dreadful."

"She might very well if she had known how you were deceiving your mother," said Electa in papa's tone.

"Now don't you ever, ever, ever tell; will you? Do you promise?"

"Yes, I promise," said Electa solemnly.

"I'll put the things back as soon as I can."

Through the stubble with slow step they walked, Electa stopping once to rest beside a shock of corn. Susie's face was flushed, tearful, and frightened; Electa's very grave, and as papa's would have been, somewhat stern. Electa was finding it hard to forgive her.

"I don't dare tell mother," said Susie, as Electa arose to go on.

"I would. I couldn't rest until I confessed."

"But I didn't do it."

"Why didn't you?"

"Because you wouldn't go with me, I suspect," laughed Susie.

"You won't be happy until you are forgiven."

"I'm not happy now; I've been cross all day. I was hoping for you. I knew that you wouldn't go with me if it were wicked. Don't you want to know what will happen to you when you grow up?"

"Yes; I confess I do. I want to know if I shall have a letter to-night, and what will be in it. I want to know that more than any thing else. What do you want to know?"

"Oh, ever so many things! Every thing that

will happen to me. I want to know if I shall ever go to boarding-school; Trude thinks it is so splendid. I had a letter from her last night; and I want to know if I shall ever have an organ and a diamond ring, and if I shall ever travel in Europe, and if mother will ever pay off the mortgage on this house, and—"

"Did you think that the gypsy knew all these things?" asked Electa, smiling.

"She pretends to."

"I'll tell you a better fortune than she can."

"Oh, do!" cried Susie eagerly.

Electa spoke seriously. "Judging by what you have done to-night, I imagine that you have deceived your mother before; if you want a happy fortune,—"

"Oh, I do."

"Then be good, and get it. I hope you'll go to boarding-school, and have the organ. I want you to have good things; papa says *obey* and *pray* will get good things."

Susie pouted and would not speak. Obedience was the hardest of all hard work, and she had not learned how to pray; nevertheless she wanted good things.

Again they passed through the rickety gateway, and again Electa stood upon the flat door-stone. Nervously and eagerly Susie took off the cover of the tea canister and poured back the tea; she opened the sugar box and poured back the sugar, reached up to the top shelf and replaced the can-

dles, and then hastily, for her mother's step was at the kitchen door, placed the bar of soap upon the pile in the chair, and breathed freely. These stolen articles were the heaviest weight that she had ever carried.

"Why, girls, I thought you had gone out!" Mrs. Prentiss exclaimed as she entered the kitchen.

"We didn't go far," said Susie from the storeroom. "Electa, must you go now, right away?"

"I see Ned and the old horse; I want to see what he has for me."

Susie followed Electa around to the front gate; they stood at the gate till Ned trotted up on the walk, Susie keeping her arm around Electa.

"Any thing for me?" queried Electa, as steadily as she could speak.

"One letter, that's all. It's in my pocket with the others; can't you wait till I get home?"

"I can, but I don't want to."

"Well, then, here goes. It's a thin letter in a yellow envelope, and the writing is so fine that you can't see it."

It seemed to Electa as if he would never find it. There were papers for papa, letters for papa, magazines for papa, letters for Celia, a package for Robin, letters for Nan, one for Mollie, a book for mamma, but the thin letter in the yellow envelope was not forth-coming.

In each pants' pocket, in the jacket pockets he searched; he looked again among the papers and letters; it was not to be found.

"Oh dear!" sighed Electa, "can you have lost it, Ned?"

"It looks like it," he said soberly. "I saw it on the counter; I felt of it and looked at the writing; I wonder if I have lost it or left it on the counter. I don't want to go back, Electa."

"Then I'll walk back. I must have it. I can't go to sleep without it."

"You can't walk so far."

"I can try."

"I suppose I can go back; but I may have dropped it on the way; somebody'll be sure to find it, and bring it to us."

"But I want it to-night," she answered, with a patient little wail in her voice.

"Well, I'll go back. You had better go on home."

"Look everywhere on both sides of the road," advised she.

"I'll find it if it is to be found," he cried. "Now turn around, General; you and I are not fit to be mail carriers if we lose the mail."

Ned turned back and trotted off. Electa went out into the road and stood looking after him. Away off in the west and north crimson clouds were piled high; away off the hills were crowned with the crimson, yellow, and brown of oak and maple. Susie stood moodily leaning over the gate, looking off towards the hills; Electa, a little, girl-ish figure in pink and green gingham, with her brown straw hat hanging by its strings from the

back of her neck, stood in the middle of the road, a grieved, disappointed air in every breath and motion. Ned was turning to the right and the left, but apparently seeing nothing. Suppose that it should never be found? Could she write to Cousin Jane again, when she was not sure that the letter was from her?

God could see the lost letter; His eyes were upon it, He knew its hiding place. Would He show Ned where it was? Would He show her if she should follow Ned and search on both sides of the road?

"Don't look so melancholy, Electa!" said Susie; "the letter is somewhere."

"A mistake in the direction of a letter saved a king and a kingdom once. I've been waiting for this so long. It will make such a difference to me. Well," sighingly, "I'll go home; good-night."

"I'll stand here and watch for Ned," said Susie. "I hope you'll find it, Electa."

It was not easy to turn homewards with the lost letter somewhere behind her; it was so hard to do nothing towards finding it. If she should never find it, it would be among the lost things; oh, how full the world was of lost things! Her footsteps lingered; with the letter behind her she could not go forward. Suddenly there was a rustle among a clump of young trees by the roadside; she knew the road so well by night and day that she was not startled. She stayed her steps and turned to look towards the village.

"Oh, dear," she sighed; "oh, dear me."

"Little miss, may I tell you what you have lost?"

The words and the whining voice startled her into a low cry; almost too frightened to see clearly, she saw before her a short, stout figure wrapped in a dirty red cloak; the dark ugly face peered from beneath long, tangled iron gray hair. A grimy, long hand was extended towards her, almost clutching her. "Put your pretty white hand in mine, deary, and let me tell your fortune."

"No, thank you," said Electa clearly, with an effort speaking at all.

"You will never find what you have lost unless you do," persisted the gypsy coaxingly.

"I'll risk it. I think I shall find it."

"I know where it is."

"I shall know pretty soon," answered Electa, trembling from head to foot.

"You are the little lame girl, the parson's daughter. Bless your sweet face! I'd find it for you if I could, for your beautiful mother's sake. She gave me some butter-milk to-night, and the rarest thing of all, a few kind words, and said she hoped God would take care of me, for He came into the world to *find* me because I am lost. Nobody ever said that to me before. Bless your sweet face; good evening to you."

Gathering her cloak about her, with a low inclination of her bare gray head the woman passed on. Electa had murmured "thank you;" she was shivering with fear and almost too weak to stand.

The red cloak moved on slowly. Electa turned again; the wild locks were blowing about the gypsy's shoulders, she was muttering quick words, claspings and unclasping her hands. Among all the lost things in the world to-night was this old, wicked woman; no one could find her but Jesus, the Lord. Electa stood watching her until she had passed Susie's gate; Susie was not there, after one frightened glance towards the gypsy she had run in to her mother.

The red cloak was stooping; the bony fingers had found something, something yellow. Was it her letter? Now she was examining it, turning it over and over, and now holding it above her head and waving it in the air.

"Here's your letter," she shouted.

"Oh, thank you," cried Electa, starting towards her.

The woman walked rapidly towards her; taking Electa's eager, outstretched hand. "You are not afraid to touch the dirty old woman now with your clean little hands. I hope that I have brought you a blessing, for your sweet mother's sake."

"I thank you very, very much," cried Electa. "I'll never forget you. I was afraid that I shouldn't find it."

"You will always find what is good for you to find. I lived in a home once, and had a mother. I have lost my life, and that's harder to find than a letter."

"I hope you'll find it," said Electa pityingly. "Come and see mother; she'll help you look."

"We move again to-morrow. I hope there's a blessing in the letter, deary."

The red cloak touched Electa's dress as the woman made a motion to go on; for one instant the bony hand was laid on hers.

"Good-night; and thank you again," said Electa. She held the yellow letter in her hand, it was Cousin Jane's fine, cramped penmanship. She went on a little way before she could tear it open. Would it take her away from home? Almost wishing that the gypsy had not found it, she tore it slowly open.

"DEAR LITTLE COUSIN ELECTA:—We cried over your letter. We can hardly wait until you come. You shall have every thing you want. Mr. Ryle says that he will meet you at the Swanzey depot and bring you here in his carriage. Send him a line when to meet you. Our kind regards to every one of you.

"Your affectionate cousins,

"JANE AND PATTY WESTLAKE."

It was decided then, at last, after all the long, weary suspense. Holding it in her hand she went on slowly, not turning once to look back.

"I say, 'Lecta." General's feet were close behind her. "I'm dreadful sorry, but I can't find the letter"

"Look in my hand and find it," she said; "the gypsy woman found it. It was on the grass, below Susie's gate."

"I don't believe it. How could she find it, when I looked and couldn't?"

"Perhaps it was under something. You must believe the evidence of your own eyes."

"I don't. She had it in her pocket. I know it *wasn't* in the grass."

"I know it is in my hand and that's all I care to know."

"Are you going, then?"

"Yes, I'm going, I suppose, if papa and mamma are willing."

Mamma read the letter, then gave it to papa.

"Well," he said.

"I'll go and see them," she said thoughtfully.

"O, mamma, mamma! Will you, really?" cried Electa throwing both arms around her mother's neck.

"My little daughter, did you think that papa and I would let you go among strangers not knowing how you would be cared for?"

That night Electa prayed: "Our Father, please find the lost gypsy woman and make her good." For a long time afterward she prayed for her, but she never learned how her prayer was answered.



VI.

OUT IN THE WORLD.

It was a raw day in early November; a storm had been threatening for two days, and in the twilight the rain began to fall in slow, heavy drops. The cylinder stove in the little waiting-room at Swanzey was red hot, the train had arrived a few moments since, leaving but two travellers, an old gentleman and a young girl; the old gentleman had looked neither to the right hand nor to the left, but had opened his umbrella and hurried away; but the young girl had gazed long in both directions as she stood under the awning on the platform; she had shaken her head to a colored man, and to a young boy who had both said, "Carriage, ma'am," and gone reluctantly into the empty waiting-room. Her trunk stood upon the platform, it was the only thing within a hundred miles that was a part of home; after another glance towards it, she opened the waiting-room door and went to the red-hot stove and stood there shivering. There was nothing like home anywhere; the street out of each window was unfamiliar, the stores were not like

home, for there were no stores at home; on the top of a sandy eminence there stood a handsome house, out of another window she saw a row of stores, opposite the stores among the dwellings she noticed one farther back from the road than the others, with a grass plat and pretty piazza; there were flowers and white curtains at the lower windows; at one of them an old lady with white hair was standing with a flower in her hand. The house attracted her, and the old lady's hair and the flower in her hand. That was not home, but it was home-like. She wondered how many daughters the old lady had. The lady lingered but a moment, her bit of home went with her; it was growing darker and darker, the slow rain-drops fell heavily upon her heart. They were all at the tea-table at home, and Vail was asking, "Where is Electa now?" She could hear his voice, she could see her mother's face, she could see Robin as she helped the fruit. Was any one sitting in her place? It would be her place still if she stayed away forever. If that lady were only Cousin Jane or Cousin Patty!

It was growing darker and darker, and no one had come to meet her. Her father had written to Mr. Ryle, not giving him time to reply, taking it for granted that he would be at home. Suppose that he were not at home, what would she do? What could she do? What should she do? She walked up and down considering, meanwhile it was growing darker and darker. A man came in, looked at her questioningly and curiously, and then

proceeded to light the kerosene lamp that was placed against the wall.

"Is Mr. Ryle's parsonage near the depot?" she found courage to ask.

"Oh," he exclaimed scrutinizingly, "that's where you're going! Just over the way, the house that's back from the road, where the flowers are."

"Thank you," she answered brightly. She could not feel strange now; if he did not come in an hour she would go to his home. She could not feel timid and strange with that old lady.

"A fine man is Mr. Ryle," the man continued.

"Yes," said Electa.

"You know where the house is?" he asked.

"Yes."

He brushed the dust off the lamp, took off the chimney and replaced it, turned the wick up higher and turned it down lower, after another long look at her face and hands, at her waterproof and umbrella, and at the parcels in her hand, he slowly made his way out. Electa smiled as she thought that it was rather hard for him not to know why she waited there instead of crossing the street. With the slightest encouragement he would have inquired, but Electa's tone was not encouraging. The door opened again; she was at the window watching the lights at the parsonage windows; her heart gave a sudden throb as she turned towards the opening door, for it was more than a slight trial for her to meet this stranger who was coming to meet her,—who had been coming to

meet her all the years that both had lived. She felt that he was coming into her life to do her good, that he had done good in her life already. With a disappointed glance and a feeling of relief that she had not to meet him just this minute, she seated herself on the wooden bench that ran along the whitewashed wall and waited. The new-comer was an Irishwoman with a broad, red face and closely curling black hair; she was wrapped in a red and green plaid shawl, a soiled, white woollen cloud being twined around her head and neck. After depositing a bandbox, a satchel, and two brown paper parcels on the seat beside Electa, she seated herself close to her parcels, folded her hands on her knees, and looked around. In striking contrast was the little figure in the long, brown waterproof, buttoned from feet to chin; over Electa's hat was tied a brown veil with the ends flowing over her braids; one hand was gloved in a shabby, brown kid glove, the other, bare, nervous and slight, held a package of gum-drops and an illustrated paper. The dampness had brought a tinge of color to her cheeks and curled a stray lock of hair that had dropped over her forehead. Her face was very sweet and patient to-day, rather too quiet, almost lacking animation when in repose, and the voice like the face was almost too quiet, unless she were very much interested, and usually she was not very much interested. She had lived within herself all her life. All her life! She would not have smiled at the phrase, for the

seventeen years seemed to her a long and full lifetime. Trude and the boys were so much younger. Seventeen years and three months! She would not have you forget the three months, for in these eventful three months she had begun to learn that there was something in the world outside of herself. Papa's parting words had been suggestive.

"Promise me something, daughter."

"If I can, papa."

"Promise me that you will not think of yourself until you see me again."

She hesitated and looked doubtful.

"If—I can," she promised slowly; "I will do my best."

Must she forget herself now, in thinking of the Irishwoman and her huge piece of cheese? The woman had taken a yellow paper bundle from her satchel and unrolling it, disclosed a square piece of cheese, certainly half a pound, and biting into it, holding it with both hands, was eating it with much relish.

"Would you be pleased to take a bit, miss?" she inquired politely, as Electa's eyes betrayed her notice of it.

"No, thank you; I never eat it."

"It's very good."

"I see that it is. I am glad that you like it," said Electa, trying to think of this something outside of herself.

"I haven't had any breakfast and scarce any dinner."

"Then you must be hungry," Electa said, rising to prevent further conversation.

She paced the length of the small room, at one side of the stove, then at the other; she stood before each of the three windows and looked out into the rain and the darkness. The stores were being lighted and there was a voice in the street, a strange voice, one hundred miles away from The Beehive.

"If he do not come, what shall I do?" she thought. "I might take a carriage and go to Cousin Jane's myself. I might go to the parsonage—but I won't! Perhaps he has changed his mind and doesn't wish to take the trouble; I will not trouble him, he needn't be afraid, I can find the way by myself." Ought she to have faith in him and wait? It was not in her heart to give faith lightly; but she trusted Mr. Ryle—his eyes were true, his voice was true. That day that she had stood on the edge of the wood, looking into it, watching his movements, how surprised she would have been had she known that before very long she would be waiting for him at a depot near his own parsonage, the only one not quite a stranger within a hundred miles. It was growing darker and darker, the rain was beating heavily against the panes.

"I think I won't stay and be Casabianca," she thought. "I'll go out and find somebody." She opened the door and looked out upon the platform; her trunk stood there bearing her solitary

company, lights far and near were glimmering through the rain. Closing the door with a sinking heart, for she did not like to be out in the world taking care of herself, she walked up and down the room thinking. She did not know what to do. It would be very lonely to drive this dark night through a strange country with a stranger; she would not know whether or not he were taking her in the right direction; but that was one alternative. The other was to make herself known at the parsonage.

Which was the wiser thing to do? She shrank unutterably from both; was there no other thing to do? She might go to a hotel, but she had never been in a hotel in her life, and to sleep among strangers was most intolerable of all.

"Can I help you, miss?" inquired the Irish-woman.

Electa was not brave; her eyes were full of tears.

"No, thank you. Do you know where Miss Jane Westlake lives?"

"Westlake? No; I never heard the name, ma'am."

At that instant the door opened; Electa sprang forward with both hands outstretched, the tears now not only in her eyes, but on her cheeks. The same face, rugged, shrewd, kindly, the same black eyes that had looked down at her from under the Panama hat; this time her hands, gum-drops, picture paper and all were taken and held; in that other time he was not a strange stranger, in this time he seemed a near friend.

"Miss Electa, I beg your pardon. You are not very tired waiting; you did not feel very strange? Three minutes since I returned from a three days absence; your father's letter was handed me, and here I am. You must have been here half an hour."

"Half a lifetime," she laughed.

"Can you walk a short distance? Are your feet protected? Your trunk shall be sent to Miss Westlake's by stage to-morrow; my buggy will not hold it. Can you exist all night without it? Would you like to open it and take out any thing?"

"I don't know," she said, withdrawing her hands. It would be lonely not to have her Bible, her very own Bible on this first night.

"We want you to stay at the parsonage to-night; my mother is waiting to see you. I told Miss Jane that I should take you to her at my own convenience. I will have your trunk sent over to the parsonage; how thoughtless I was."

"But can't I go on to Cousin Jane's?"

"In the rain? And it promises to be a dark night."

"But I don't know your mother."

"You don't know Cousin Jane either; and you do know me. I think that you will have to stay where you know somebody."

"Won't Cousin Jane be disappointed?"

"Hardly; she will not expect you in this rain. And my mother will be disappointed. She is blind; do you not wish to give her this pleasure?"

"Oh, is she blind? Then I will go. I did not think that she would care."

"She has never seen my face, and I am her only child."

"And she hasn't any girls? I wish that she had some girls."

"So do I. Now wait one moment. I'll go out and send your trunk over."

"Thank you," said Electa gratefully, feeling as he left her, as if she were out in the world and being taken care of.

"Now you are safe," cried the Irishwoman.

"Yes; now I'm safe," replied Electa.

Mr. Ryle returned in one moment. After taking Electa's hand and drawing it through his arm, he opened the door and they stepped out upon the platform. The rain dashed against them and the wind blew cold in their faces.

"This isn't a good night for you to become acquainted with our little village, but you shall see it in the sunshine; some day you shall see all the world in the sunshine, as my mother does. She is the happiest woman I know. I shall often take her over to see you at Miss Westlake's, that she may show them some of her sunshine."

They crossed the street, Mr. Ryle very easily suiting his steps to hers, and passed several houses; one of them was lighted only at one side, another only at one end, another only on the first floor at the front, one was not lighted at all, but the parsonage was bright at every window.

"Mother loves the light," said Mr. Ryle, opening the gate; "she can see a glimmer of light, and it cheers her greatly."

She shyly withdrew her arm and murmured "Thank you," as they stepped upon the piazza.

Mr. Ryle threw open the door, revealing to Electa a broad, bright, carpeted hall, heated and lighted, and sweet with the breath of flowers. As she entered and stood in the vestibule, she felt as if she were in the midst of some good happening.

"Mother," Mr. Ryle called, "I've brought your little girl."

The doors leading into back and front parlors and into the study at the end of the hall were all open; a slow step touched the soft carpet, and then standing in the doorway of the front parlor Electa saw the white-haired lady with the flower in her hand.

Mr. Ryle took her hand and led her to his mother. The lady stooped and took her into her arms. "You are 'only Electa,'" she said, "and not Nan, nor Celia, nor Robin, nor Trude, nor Mollie."

"She is a little thing, mother, with blue eyes and hair like pale gold, and all the rest you will see for yourself."

"Are you tired, dear?"

"Oh, no, ma'am," said Electa, feeling as if she were never tired in her life.

"I will take you upstairs that you may feel at home in your room. Where is her trunk, David?"

"It will be here immediately. You ladies can't exist without a trunk."

"Not when they have been travelling in the rain," said his mother.

Mrs. Ryle stepped slowly up the stairs with her hand upon the stair-railing; Electa followed, taking slow steps with her hand upon the stair-railing. God had laid His hand upon them both. Mrs. Ryle knew that to her it had been in blessing; perhaps Electa would know it, too, some day. Mr. Ryle watched them with a tender light shining through his misty eyes.

"My mother and my little girl," he thought, "may God make that child as happy a woman as my mother is."

The doors upon the second floor were all thrown open; each room being lighted by a lamp suspended from the ceiling in the hall.

"You shall have the blue room," said Mrs. Ryle pausing as she reached the top stair; blue is the color of the sky and it is the color of your eyes."

The blue room was the prettiest little room that Electa had ever seen. Its walls were tinted with pearl and bordered with crimson, blue, and gold; the carpet was of shaded blues mingled with white; the curtains were of dotted white muslin, reaching the carpet and tied back with heavy blue cord; the furniture was a cottage set of white ornamented with pansies; every thing about the low bedstead was of the purest white; the pictures were all hung with blue cord, and every bit

of fancy work and every ornament upon table, mantel, bracket, and bureau was tinted with blue.

"Oh, how pretty!" cried Electa, standing upon the threshold; "oh, how pretty! I never saw any thing so pretty in my life. It is too pretty for me, Mrs. Ryle; I wish that mamma could see it, and Nan, and Celia, and—why, all of them."

"It is just pretty enough for you then. I wish that you were to stay a long time in it."

"I wish so, too. Can't I fall sick? I would love to be sick in this room? Can't I do something so that you will have to keep me?"

"I wish it might be; but what would those old cousins do? A home without a little girl in it is very desolate. I am the joyful mother of a son, but I have always desired a little girl beside. Miss Patty is very ill—I haven't had time to tell David; the doctor told me to-day that he does not expect to find her alive to-morrow."

"Are they all alone now, too? Don't you think that I ought to go to-night?" asked Electa, with a frightened look in her eyes.

"No, they are not alone; the doctor called at the neighbors as soon as he was sent for, and they were all most glad to go to them."

"I think that I might better go to-night," said Electa, looking troubled. "I ought to go; perhaps they need me."

"Dear child, you could do no good; the neighbors are very kind."

"But she expects me"

"She is too ill to expect any body. Miss Jane will need you to-morrow."

Electa sighed and assented; she could not ask Mr. Ryle to take her in this storm; he had been on a journey, and he must be tired; but perhaps she could never do any thing for Cousin Patty unless she went to-night; the poor old lady had been looking forward to her coming, and now she had come too late.

"There's your trunk at the door now. David is telling them to leave it in the hall; it will not be worth while to bring it upstairs for to-night. Wouldn't you like to go down and take out what you want?"

"Yes'm, I'd like to change my dress."

"And then we'll have tea, and a long evening together, if you are not too weary. It is the night of David's weekly lecture, so that we shall be alone together."

Mrs. Ryle could not see the shade of disappointment that swept over Electa's face; the weekly lecture would be so like home, and she was hungering and thirsting for some word from God, some word that Mr. Ryle might have for her to-night.

"I do not go out in the rain; the church is a five minutes' walk around the corner, and I know that you have been out enough for one day. I want you to talk to me."

"Thank you," said Electa, stifling the sob of homesickness in her throat.

"You are sure that you like your room?" asked the lady anxiously.

"Like it, Mrs. Ryle! I can think of nothing prettier."

"There is a lamp on the corner of the mantel, and the matches—"

"I see them in this pretty match-safe," said Electa, touching the white china dog upon the bureau.

"Then I'll go down and wait for you in the back parlor."

"I will not be very long."

As they descended the stairs together Electa pondered; was it right for her to stay here and be comfortable when Cousin Patty expected her and might be needing her? If she were not needed in the sick room, there might be something for her to do about the house; Cousin Jane was very old and needed to be waited upon. But Mr. Ryle must know what was best for her to do, and how could she ask him to go out in the storm again? If she might decide herself, she would certainly go; she would keep her word at all hazards, she had promised to be with them to-night. She would rather walk all the lonely, dark, stormy way than not go to Cousin Patty before she died. She had cried over her letter, she had been longing for her, and now she had come too late.

"Child, are you sighing?" asked Mrs. Ryle, laying her hand upon Electa's shoulder.

"Was I? Papa says that is one of my habits."

Her trunk had been placed near the front parlor door; it was a small hair trunk with her father's initials in brass-headed nails upon one end. It was the trunk that he had gone out into the world with half a century ago.

Mrs. Ryle stooped and laid her hand upon it. She waited until Electa had unlocked it and taken out her dress and the article that she would need for the night.

"Let me touch your dress," she said.

Electa laid it across her arm. "It is merino, an excellent quality, trimmed with velvet, there are velvet bows on the sleeves, and loops of velvet, narrower, at the throat. It is blue!"

"Yes'm; a dark blue, and the velvet is blue."

"There is lace at the neck and at the sleeves."

"Mother wore that lace on her wedding day; the girls have all worn it, now it is my turn," said Electa, dropping the lid of her trunk.

"It is very pretty. I have some of the same kind. Your hair is in braids, isn't it? Will you unbraid it and let it fall over your shoulders? I want you to be a real little girl to-night."

"No fear of any thing else mother!" cried a voice from the study; "she is the littlest big girl I know."

With her dress across her arm and her Bible and toilet articles in her hands Electa went upstairs alone; laying aside her things she lighted the small glass lamp, placed it on the bureau, and closed the door. If her chamber at Cousin Jane's might only be like this; but that was a poor, cold,

bare, little room she knew; her mother had chosen it for her because it opened out of Cousin Patty's room. She would enjoy the luxury of the color and light and warmth to-night, it would help her bear her room to-morrow night. The whistle of the locomotive sounded in the distance; that was strange and unlike home. For one homesiek moment she opened her Bible and leaned her head upon it. As she raised her head a tear fell upon the words, "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." He was her home; she could not die with homesickness, she could not be a hundred miles away from Him. In this pretty room and in the bare, cold, ugly room He was her home. He was Christ's home when He was away from home down here on the earth. She straightened herself and looked at the reflection of herself; that face was like home; it was the face that mamma and Vail and all of them were missing. Unbuttoning her waterproof, she threw it over a chair and laid aside veil and hat and gloves; the illustrated paper and the gum-drops she was keeping for the old ladies. She had been so sorry that she had nothing else to bring them. But Cousin Patty would not care, she could never do any thing for her. This would be the first time that she had worn the blue merino. Robin had given her the velvet and Celia had made the dress. They had all gathered around her when she had put it on and said how pretty she looked. It was her only new dress; the brown alpaca that had belonged to

Robin she would wear every day, she liked it because Robin had worn it last winter. Unbraiding her two long braids, the hair fell in waves of pale gold over her shoulders reaching to her waist; she tied it back with blue ribbon tying it in a bow upon the top of her head.

"I want to be pretty for her," she said aloud.

The face reflected as she stood before the glass was a sweet, innocent, unconscious face, as child-like as girlish, very lovable to those who loved girls. Shaking back her hair, and fastening an old-fashioned twisted gold pin into the loops of velvet at her throat, she took a last survey of herself and turned from the glass. Was she selfish and wicked to stay here and be comfortable? After standing still a moment in the centre of the room, she sank upon her knees at the bedside, dropping her head upon the white counterpane.

"Please take care of me out in the world," she said; "and make me a blessing and bless every body at home to-night, and take Cousin Patty to heaven, and don't let me die of homesickness please, Our Father, for Jesus' sake."

Rising slowly, with her eyes full of tears, she extinguished the light and opened the door into the lighted hall. She lingered a moment on the stairs under pretence of brushing her hair away from her face, but in reality because such a fit of shyness seized her that, if she could, she would have run out into the rain and darkness, rather than go down into the parlor to greet her two

new friends. But now was the time not to shrink within herself, but to obey her father and think of the things outside of herself. One slow step and then another, and she stood on the threshold of the front parlor, alone, for Mr. Ryle had shut himself up within his study and his mother was seated in a red plush arm-chair before the fire in the grate in the back parlor, with her feet upon the fender and her hands folded over some white fancy work in her lap; her face with its closed, sightless eyes was turned towards Electa. There was a scar upon her forehead and one cheek was discolored.

"I hear you, Electa; come here and let me touch you."

Electa drew near and knelt on the carpet, resting both hands upon the arm of her chair. The tender, white fingers smoothed back Electa's hair and touched her forehead, her cheeks, her chin, her lips, her eyes, and then taking both hands in hers, she said: "Now I know you. Your hands are little and smooth, they are clinging hands, your lips do not pout, your eyes do not stare, your hair is soft and yielding, you are as fragrant as a wood flower. I have the blessing of those who love without seeing. David has taken a cup of tea and shut himself up until the bell rings; you and I will have our tea alone together, and you shall tell me about The Beehive, how they all look and talk and what they love to do."

"I'll tell you about Vail first," said Electa rising; "he is as quaint as a hymn of the middle ages."



VII.

SHELTERED.

Opposite the front parlor door, across the hall, a door opened into the dining-room; this room was long and low with a bright carpet, and gay paper upon the walls; a fire was burning in the grate, before it on the rug lay stretched a large Newfoundland dog. On the round table, covered with a crimson cloth, was spread a most tempting supper, an arm-chair was placed at the head and at the foot of the table.

"Please take David's chair," said David's mother as she seated herself at the head of the table; "he will not eat until he returns from lecture. This silver service was among my wedding presents, let me see—forty years ago. I have given it to David's wife."

"I haven't seen his wife," said Electa. "Isn't she here?"

"I do not know where she is, but God knows. I ask Him every day to give a wife to David before I die. I think of her so much that I feel acquainted with her. I do not think that he will find her among his people. There are many fine

women and sweet girls, however. I want his wife to be with him in his work, heart and soul; to be not only his wife, but a minister's wife."

"That's what my mother is," said Electa.

Mrs. Ryle touched a bell upon the table near her right hand and almost instantly a pretty colored girl brought in the tea.

As she withdrew Electa exclaimed, "How pretty and lady-like she is!"

"Isn't she? Her mother was with me thirty years, and Mercy was born in my house."

Electa drew the napkin from her ring and waited. Mrs. Ryle bowed her head and asked God to refresh and strengthen them by this food for His service. Electa never forgot that supper so daintily served.

"Mercy suggested oysters, for she thought that our traveller might be hungry. What else is there upon the table?"

"Cold chicken," said Electa, "preserved peaches, jelly, oranges, bread and butter, plain cake and ginger snaps, cheese and a pitcher of milk."

"May I give you a cup of tea?"

"I prefer milk, thank you; I am a country girl. May I help you to some oysters, even if you are not a traveller?"

"Will you help yourself, and eat heartily?"

"I will, thank you."

"And now tell me about Vail."

Vail was the beginning of a long story; there were stories to tell of Ned, Guy, and Baby, and

questions to be answered about Arch, and Martyn, and all the others. Mrs. Ryle was interested in Trude's studies, in Robin's air-castles, in Celia's winter work, and in all that Nan and Mollie had planned for the winter, in mamma's doings, and in papa's preaching.

As the church bell sounded Mr. Ryle came to the doorway.

"Why, Miss Electa, how your tongue can fly. My mother has a talent for making silent people talk. How cosey you look! And, mother, you have put somebody in my chair! There will be very few at church to-night; I shall be home before an hour, probably."

He came to his mother's side and kissed her.

"Excuse me for being such a big boy," he said.

Electa tasted the oysters and talked, tasted the peaches and talked, and ate an orange and talked, while Mrs. Ryle ate and listened and listened and did not eat.

If The Beehive were not so far away, and if poor Cousin Patty were not so ill and expecting her, how happy Electa would have been!

"I want to see your lovely mother," said Mrs. Ryle, "she is the joyful mother of children. How she is blessed and honored! My husband was a merchant, he lost his health through overdue devotion to business, we travelled in Europe the last two years of his life. It was in Italy that I lost my sight and in Italy that my boy was born. We buried papa there, and I came home a sightless

widow, with a child not a year old. That was over thirty years ago. David and I have never been separated; we boarded together all through his studies. My boy is old and grave for his years, his wife will bring his youth back. He never replies when I say that to him. In the first year of his preaching he had a sore trial, poor boy. He was to be married, but the lady changed her mind; she said that his heart was too much in his work, that she was not fitted to be a minister's wife, that she could not be happy with him, but that if he would study law or medicine, she would keep her engagement."

"Oh, how wicked! How could she?" cried Electa, with indignant eyes.

"There was not even a struggle; he gave her up so quietly that she declared that he had not loved her. But he grew old after that; I never had to chide him again for being too full of fun."

"Wasn't she fitted to be a minister's wife?" asked Electa.

"What do you think?"

"Couldn't she learn to be?"

"She shortly afterward married an old physician, a rich man; probably she thought herself fitted to be his wife. David is genial enough, now, but so grave; he works and studies, and takes so little recreation."

"Was she pretty?" asked Electa, interestedly.

"That's a girl's question," answered Mrs. Ryle, smiling; "she was tall and fine looking, a brunette,

with wonderful eyes, as stately as a queen; the students called her Queen Isabel. My poor boy, my heart broke for him; he threw himself down at my feet and cried, 'O, mother, mother!' It was the first time that I could not comfort him. He loved his Master best; he forsook all to follow Him."

From that hour David Ryle became a hero to Electa; nay, more than a hero—a saint.

As they arose from the table Mrs. Ryle said, "I suppose you know that you will have something to bear at Miss Westlake's."

"Mother was there last week," said Electa, "she prepared me for some things. I think I know what to expect."

"Poor child, what will you do for young life? you have had your being among so much that was young and alive, how will you thrive? It would be hard for you to be here with David and me—but there! Do you know how to make the best of things?"

"No, ma'am," said Electa sadly.

They crossed the hall and passed through the front parlor into the back parlor; Mrs. Ryle reseated herself in her plush chair and asked Electa to sit on the rug at her feet. There Mr. Ryle found them some time later; the black figure with its placid face and unseeing eyes, and the little blue figure at her feet with the fair head against her knee. They were talking about making the best of things. Heart had spoken to heart; these two had adopted each other.

Shall Electa give you your tea, my son?"

"No; but she may bring me an orange and a cracker. Will you serve me, Miss Electa?" he asked drawing a chair to his mother's side.

"Thank you, with pleasure," she said. She had forgotten that she was among strangers. After the orange had been eaten and Mr. Ryle had given his mother the names of those who were at service she said, "We will have worship so that our traveller may retire; she wishes to start very early in the morning, I suspect."

"We will start at dawn, if you say so, Miss Electa; that reminds me, the doctor was at church; he said that he had told you about Miss Patty, mother; there may be a change for the better, but he thinks it scarcely possible. She is conscious; she told him that a little girl was coming soon; she took cold—she has pneumonia—in putting a room in order for you, Miss Electa; she told the doctor all about it, that the rag carpet was of her own making, and asked him to go in and look at the room. It was very touching, he said, to see the things they have gathered together."

"Oh, I want to go," cried Electa. "I wish that I could go to-night!"

"If she is dying, you can do her no good to-night; and, if she live, you will be with her in the morning," said Mrs. Ryle; "you are too weary yourself to take that drive to-night."

Electa was silent, she could not press her will

"Isn't that reasonable?" asked Mr. Ryle.

"Yes, sir," assented Electa, with her heart crying out: "Oh, I do want to go to-night."

"We will go into the study for worship," said Mrs. Ryle rising.

Such a study! Electa stood on the threshold and looked around; the room was small, crowded, packed, piled with books; it was heated by a wood fire in an open Franklin; there were two large windows opposite each other, the white shades were down; Electa wondered what the view might be; there were two easy chairs and a lounge, a table covered with every thing, a reading and writing desk, strewn with papers and magazines, two large portraits hung over the mantel, and an engraving of Christ blessing the little children stood upon the top of a low bookcase between a bust of Milton and one of Shakspeare. At her first confused glance Electa saw all this; Mr. Ryle smiled at the expression of her face.

"I have the care of this room; it looks like it, doesn't it?"

"I know what chaos is now," said Electa. "Wouldn't you like it put in order?"

"It is in prime order; I know where every thing is."

"Every thing is everywhere, I think."

Mrs. Ryle sat down upon the lounge and drew Electa down beside her. Mr. Ryle seated himself at his desk and opened the Bible; the light from the student lamp fell upon his face. He was not so old as she had imagined, but he must be over thirty,

and over thirty was aged to her seventeen years, he was not handsome; the hair upon his temples was iron gray, his eyes were large and gentle and very dark, the large mouth was almost stern,—she wondered what kept it from being wholly stern,—cheeks, chin and upper lip were smooth; it was a face with no beauty of form or coloring, a face expressive of intellect, spirituality, and character. Electa felt this, she could not put it into words. It was a face that might fitly belong to her saint.

“We are reading in course,” he said, turning the leaves of the Bible; “to-night we learn how Peter was guided in a doubtful way by God’s word, by His Spirit, by His providence. He was moved to do His good pleasure by this threefold command, each agreeing with the other, each witnessing that the other was from God. We, also, may have His word, His Spirit, and His providence, the one will interpret the other, therefore we do not doubt that He is leading us; our way need not be a doubtful way. It is never wrong to stand still until we are told where to go, how to go, and what to go for. Cornelius was sent to Peter as well as Peter to Cornelius. God spoke to each and each understood. God speaks so plainly that we never need misunderstand. The prepared word is always ready for the prepared heart.”

Electa listened, almost holding her breath. Before she slept she must confess to Mr. Ryle about finding in the Bible the words, “And it shall come to pass.”

"Peter was praying when God spoke to him; a praying heart is ever a listening heart. If we seek to know His will that we may do it and do it for His sake and not for our own selfishness, we may be sure that He will speak to us."

Was she going to Cousin Patty's for selfishness? If she went to-night would it be selfishness?

She listened eagerly to every word that Mr. Ryle read, and followed with all her heart the words of his simple, earnest prayer.

Rising from her knees, she lifted down a heavy book from the book-shelves over the lounge, and stood looking through it as she tried to summon courage to speak to Mr. Ryle about the thing that she had done.

"Excuse me," said Mrs. Ryle, "I wish to speak to Mercy."

Could she tell him? Would he think such a little thing worth listening to? He had opened a book and was apparently absorbed in it, leaning his head upon his hand. After an instant's hesitation she moved towards him with the heavy book in her hand. For two long moments he did not raise his eyes; then she timidly laid her hand upon his book.

"I am going away to-morrow, and I want to ask you something. I want to tell you about something that I did. May I interrupt you?"

He took the book from her hand, and seated her in his chair, and brought another to her side.

"Well," he said encouragingly.

It was not a long story, but it seemed to her long and hard to tell; she told him about the light that she had taken for a sign and about looking in the Bible.

"Was I very wicked?" she asked tremulously.

"You were very much mistaken. God does not send such signs to guide us."

"He gave the Israelites a light to shine on the way."

"He gives to each of us just the word that we need; you have your reason, you have His word, and His Spirit, you do not need a sign; you have all the truth that your father and mother have taught you. His truth is written in His word just for you, to suit your every emergency. Not what God will bring to pass for you, but what He will have you *do* is all that you have to take thought about. You must seek His will in His way; His way is through prayer and through the prayerful, diligent study of His word, especially the words of Jesus. It was right for you to stay at home, it was right, if your father and mother willed it so, for you to leave home. God does care whether you stayed or whether you came; He could make it work for good either way, He could bless you in staying or coming. It was not such a great matter, after all, as you were thinking; to love God best and most and first of all is the great business of life; do not be too much concerned about going or staying, except as it involves a question of obedience or disobedience. You were a little too

much concerned, and you took a wrong way to know God's mind about it. He has opened a way for you to do good to somebody, to serve those old people for His sake—"

"Not only, I want the money," interrupted Electa, hastily, with burning cheeks.

"But you want the money for an unselfish reason," he answered smiling. The smile sweetened all the sternness out of his lips.

"Yes, I think I do."

"Your mistakes were through ignorance."

She drew a sigh of relief.

"Think about our Lord, His life, and His teachings, and forget about yourself; you think of Him and He will think of you."

"I can't think about myself any more; I promised papa that I would think about the things outside of myself."

"Then why isn't your trouble all gone? What are your eyes so big about?"

"Because—because—I suppose it is foolish, but I'm so afraid that Cousin Patty will die and I shall not speak to her."

"And you would rather go to her to-night?"

"I would rather, but—"

"Then you shall go. Gypsy is tired with her long drive to-day, but I'll get another horse; run upstairs and wrap yourself up; it isn't such a fearful storm as mother thinks it is."

"But she will not like it if I go."

"Yes, she will. I'll explain how you feel about

it. Wrap up well; haven't you something beside that waterproof?"

"I have a shawl in my trunk."

"I'll speak to mother, and then go out for a horse. You are not afraid of the dark?"

"I shall not be afraid; you are very good to me, Mr. Ryle."

"Am I? Wait until I do something to prove it."

The blue merino was taken off and the brown alpaca and waterproof put on; the articles that she had taken out of her trunk repacked, and she stood in the lower hall veiled, and shawled, ready to start. She would not sleep in the pretty chamber after all.

"You are pleased with me, Mrs. Ryle?" she asked, when she took her into her arms to say good-night. "You are not displeased with me."

"Not at all, dear. David would not take you unless he thought it wise. I shall come to you as soon as the storm is over." Out into the rain and darkness Electa went for the second time that night. Mrs. Ryle went back to the fire in the back parlor, sent Mercy to bed, and sat down to watch for her son's return.

"The child has hardships and loneliness before her," she said to herself.



VIII.

IN DARK AND LIGHT.

"It is very dark," said Electa, with a slight trembling of voice.

"About as dark as it ever is, I think. But your eyes will soon become accustomed to it, and then you can see something."

"I can't see any thing now; I can't even see the horse."

"I can, and some other things beside."

"Shall we pass any houses?"

"Not many after we leave Swanzey, unless we pass through Walnut Grove, and I think I will; the road is better. You may trust me. I know every inch of the road for miles around. Miss Westlake's house is in the loneliest place within five miles of us, and yet it is very charming. I knew the house when I was a boy; they used to tell stories even then about the two queer old ladies who lived behind the stone-wall. Little did I think that I'd ever take there on a stormy night a little girl who was not then born."

"This is one of the things that I was born for, I expect," said Electa, throwing back her veil that

she might feel the air upon her burning cheeks. "I hope that I shall do all the things that I was born to do."

"By 'born to do,' do you mean the doings that God had in His heart for you to do, when He sent you into the world?"

"Yes, that is a lovely way to put it; do you think I shall do them?" she asked anxiously. "I'm afraid that I haven't begun yet."

"I am sure that you will do them, if you do not hinder yourself or allow others to hinder you."

"I don't like to go contrary," she said.

"To what? To whom?" he asked.

"To people and things."

"God bids us to, oftentimes."

"That is what I don't understand, Mr. Ryle; that is what I want to understand. I don't know when God speaks to me."

"Then you can't be expected to listen."

"But I *want* to know," she said eagerly.

"Then you surely will know."

Mr. Ryle gave his attention to the horse for the first half mile, speaking to her but once and then to ask if she were comfortable.

"Very comfortable, and so safe," she answered.

Very safe she felt all the long dark way; she was comfortably seated, wrapped in a shawl, with a warm lap robe tucked in around her, leaning against the cushioned back, with her feet upon the iron foot-rest and her hands folded together under her shawl. It was not very cold; wind and rain

were behind them, and as her eyes became used to the darkness she could distinctly discern the horse and the outlines of dark objects on both sides of the way. Above and below all was deep blackness. She would have been altogether comfortable and happy had she been driving toward The Beehive instead of away from it.

"If Cousin Patty is dead, Cousin Jane will need me all the more," she said; "she will be glad to see one of her people when she feels all alone; perhaps she will miss her sister so that she will die, too. Mr. Ryle, I am so sorry to trouble you, it seems very selfish in me, but I *had* to come and there was no one to come with but you."

"I am very glad to come, Miss Electa."

"Have you driven far to-day?"

"About twenty miles."

"Are you very tired?" she asked anxiously.

"Not so very," he answered, smiling at her tone.

"What can I do to assure you that I am not a martyr?"

"You are very good to me; I didn't know that there were people like you and your mother out in the world."

"How long have you been out in the world?"

"Ever since six o'clock this morning; papa and Celia and Vail went with me to the train, they all kissed me good-by, and then I was out in the world."

"Nearly sixteen hours. In another hour you will be out of the world again."

"No, I shall not. I shall stay out in the world now. Papa wrote in my new blank book, 'Look out, and not in,' and I am not to write at all about myself. He named it for me—we always name our journals, we girls—'Out in God's World,' we give them to papa and mamma when they are full for their wedding present. Mollie and Martyn gave theirs on their last anniversary, and Celia and I give ours this year. How shall I keep from filling mine with myself?"

"Never think about yourself, think about every thing you find out in God's world."

"I expect they haven't many books, and I had so little room to bring mine."

"What did you bring?"

"'Adelaide Proctor's Poems' and 'Mrs. Hemans.' Some old school-books that I want to study, a slate and some pencils, and several story-books."

"Not an extensive library. I shall have to ask John Gray to take to you the books of mine that he has finished studying and reading. John Gray is an excellent student."

"Who is John Gray?"

"Somebody out in God's world that is worth knowing. He is one of my boys. He is nobody's boy, so I took him for mine. He never knew his father nor mother, he has no brothers nor sisters, not a relative in the world that he is aware of; he was found when an infant on the steps of the county house. Would you like to know such a waif as that?"

"I don't know,—he must have good blood or he wouldn't be a student."

"His blood is good enough for me; he is a gentleman, he is a Christian, and he promises to be a scholar. 'John' was written upon a piece of his under-clothing, and his eyes were so gray that they named him Gray. He is only a farm hand, at present."

"What does he intend to be in the future?"

"He has not decided. I try not to influence him."

"How old is he?"

"He calls Christmas Day his birthday; he will be seventeen next Christmas."

"He is younger than I am."

"And appears about ten years older; his life has all been out in the world, out in the hard world; he has suffered every thing that you have been saved from; you are a little hot-house flower and he is a sturdy sapling. I want you to see John Gray, I want him to see you; I will send him to you with books."

"Where does he live?"

"At a farm-house that we shall pass; he has been there two years, but expects to leave this fall, because Mr. Morris is not willing that he should attend school. The schoolmaster is always John's friend. Mother admires John. She knits his stockings, and does many things for him."

"I wish—I wish—" sighed Electa, "that I could know things. I am the ignorant one at home; I

have been to school very little; all I have done was to read every thing I could find."

"What are you interested in—chiefly?"

"Just now I am interested in *words*."

"If you know words you will 'know things.'"

"It is said that there are cases in which knowledge of more value may be conveyed by the history of *words* than by the history of a campaign. Language has been called fossil poetry and fossil history. Do you know who the Saxons were?"

"They were a people who lived in the northern part of Germany; they invaded and conquered England, not alone, but with other tribes, in the fifth and sixth centuries," answered Electa promptly.

"How much of our strong mother-tongue we owe to them! Sun, moon, stars, earth, water, fire, and the prime social relations,—father, mother, husband, wife, son, daughter,—are all Saxon. Palace and castle may have come from the Norman, but the dear old words: house, roof, home, hearth, we owe to the humbler Saxon. The names of almost all animals as long as they are alive are Saxon, but when prepared for the table become Norman; for the Saxon hind had the labor of tending and feeding them for the table of his Norman lord. You know about the Normans coming over to England?"

"Oh, yes," said Electa interestedly, forgetting for the moment that the horse's head was turned away from The Beehive.

"Thus Saxon ox became Norman beef, Saxon calf the Norman veal, Saxon sheep the Norman mutton. I'll get 'The Early Dawn' for you, that is a story of Saxon and Norman. You haven't read it?"

"No, sir."

"The origin of the word *heathen* is suggestive. At the introduction of Christianity into Germany the dwellers upon the heaths longest resisted the truth, while the more intelligent and learned, in the cities, became and were called Christians; these heath people, who kept to their own worship, were called heathen. The gospel of Christ found its way first in Germany in the homes of the more refined and learned. By the common phrase 'signing' our name we are kept in memory of the time when the rudiments of education were confined to the very learned; it was not as now, the exception, but the custom for persons to make their sign or mark instead of writing their names; great barons and kings were not ashamed to set their sign to the most important documents. Imagine Charlemagne making his mark. *Expend, expense*," he went on in an easy tone, "remind us that money was once weighed out and not counted as at present. Abram weighed out four hundred shekels of money current with the merchant. The word *expend* means to weigh out."

Electa's eyes were sparkling all by themselves there in the dark. To "know things" was one of the aims of her life.

"Do go on, please," she cried earnestly.

Mr. Ryle smiled all to himself there in the dark.

"*Library* preserves for us the fact that books were once written upon the barks of trees, and, at a later period, we have paper, from the Egyptian papyrus, 'the paper reeds by the brooks.' Moffat gives a remarkable example of the disappearing of one of the most significant words from the language of a tribe in South Africa, a tribe sinking deeper and deeper in barbarism; with the word of course disappeared the truth of which that word was the vehicle. The word was *Morimo*, designating the Supreme Divine Being, meaning 'Him that is above.' This word with its spiritual idea he found to have vanished from the present generation; although here and there he met with an aged man, hardly one or two in a thousand, who remembered in his early youth to have heard the word *Morimo*."

"Perhaps the mothers taught it to the little children long ago," said Electa.

"This word, once so full of meaning, survives now only in the spells and charms of their rain-makers and sorcerers."

"No wonder that they sink lower and lower," replied Electa; "we never, never can lose our dearest Name."

"A Jesuit missionary," continued Mr. Ryle, "tells us that in two of the principal tribes of Brazil he could not find any word corresponding to our

word *thanks*. In this absence lay the explanation of the fact that these tribes were inveterate askers, but never showed any gratitude for what they obtained, merely saying, 'This is what I wanted,' or, 'This will be useful to me.' Did you ever think about the word *kind*? It has a beautiful origination. We say a kind man and we speak of mankind; they seem to be quite different words, and yet they are connected by closest bonds. A kind person is a kinned person, one of kin, one who acknowledges his kinship to all others, who confesses that, being of the same blood, they have a right to all his rights. Mankind, you see, is man-kinned; the word expresses our relationship to the whole human family; you are out in the world among your own kin, to give to them every evidence of loving kinship that your heart may suggest."

"And to receive from them, as I am to-night," said Electa gratefully.

"I am your guardian; your father has given you into my especial care."

"I am very glad," she replied, in a comfortable tone. "I like to be guarded."

"Do you see that light ahead?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is in Walnut Grove, the village is but a collection of houses with one store, schoolhouse, and church."

"There's somebody coming," exclaimed Electa, "they are close to us."

"Good evening," shouted Mr. Ryle; "neighbor, am I in your way?"

"Not at all," returned a genial voice, "the road is wide enough for us both. It's as dark as Egypt, though."

Mr. Ryle turned to the right and drove more slowly. "Somebody is sick to-night," he said, "that's old Dr. Requa."

"Perhaps he's been to see Cousin Patty," said Electa. "I wish we had asked him how she was."

"He seldom goes out at night, he's old and rich."

The rain dashed against the back of the buggy, the wind blew around them, but not in their faces; stretching out her hand Electa could have touched her companion's arm or shoulder; as it was, not seeing him or touching him at all, he was only a presence and a voice, a restful, guarding, comforting presence, and the voice of one whom she could believe in—and that day not so very long ago she had run away from such a friend as this! He was her own kin, she had recognized his kinship that night that he had prayed for her.

"I never was out at night in a storm before," she said, bending forward to look up and down and around. The light was in the upper chamber of a small house; there was no shade to the one window; a woman stood before it looking out.

"Perhaps she is watching for some one who will never come," said Electa.

"Then she may learn to take God who always

is come," replied Mr. Ryle. "He never disappoints."

Electa could not reply to this. She thought of Celia, wondering how she lived with so much gone out of her life. Not knowing Celia's consolation, Celia's sorrow seemed unbearable to her.

"Do you remember my sister Celia?" she asked suddenly.

"Indeed I do," was the quick answer.

"She has had a great trouble, and she's just as bright as ever,—we couldn't do any thing without Celia. She never forgets any thing, and—she's so sure about things. I want something good to come to her."

He did not reply to her last words; perhaps there was nothing in them that held a reply; he was driving slowly, giving all his care to his horse.

Electa was hurt because he did not echo her wish. But how could he think about Celia just as she did? It was bedtime at home. The Beehive was fast asleep, all but Celia, she always found some last things to do. Tired Celia was writing a long letter to her in that very hour; in that very hour that something good *was* coming to her.

Electa knew that they had all prayed for her before they slept. Would mamma be anxious if she knew that she was out in such a storm? It was good to be out in the storm and feel safe; to feel safe because of God and because of the human protector that He had found for her.

The horse's hoofs suddenly touched a bridge

Electa started and exclaimed, "Why, we are near water."

"A small stream; now I can talk again. We are almost there. You will gather pond lilies on this stream sometime. There's an old saw-mill here that makes quite a landscape."

Almost there, and what would she meet when she did get there? A strange, dead face and a strange, living face! She would shrink almost as much from the living face as from the dead face. There would be dark night and sleeping alone to awake to more strangeness; to awake to six long months. At that instant all her courage vanished; she trembled from head to foot, and but for her habit of self-restraint would have cried out in her agony. If she might only see them all for one moment, one little moment; it was like dying, to leave them so, dying and not going to heaven. The convulsive sobs in her throat uttered no sound; in all the hardness that came afterward there was nothing so hard as that moment. It passed, and she breathed more freely; in another moment she thought that she would have died.

"Well, what now?" exclaimed Mr. Ryle, suddenly and quickly drawing the rein. "Electa, I must get out; I believe that trace is broken."

"Broken! Can't we go on? What shall we do?" cried Electa in as lively a voice as if she had not been hiding herself inside of herself.

"Take the lines, please; hold them just so, don't move them either way," he said, placing

them in her hand as he cautiously sprang to the ground.

"Are we near any house?" asked Electa, bending forward on the side nearer Mr. Ryle.

"One of the traces has broken; I couldn't mend it here in the dark even if I had material with me; but we are not far from Mr. Morris's. I am glad that I came this way; don't feel anxious; I'll lead the horse; you sit still, there's nothing else for you to do."

The reassuring voice sounded out of the rain and the darkness.

"I can do nothing to perfection," she answered laughing.

"That is a rare gift," he said, moving to the horse's head.

Suppose they could not go on? suppose they had to stay somewhere all night? She would rather walk the remainder of the way than do that. Had she been headstrong in her persistence about coming?

"Mr. Ryle—" she began. But he could not hear. The horse was taking long, slow steps. Mr. Ryle was somewhere out there in the dark.

"Mr. Ryle," she began again, but talking to him was not doing nothing, so she kept still.

A turn in the road revealed a light, she uttered a joyful exclamation. In several moments they stood before the friendly light; the light was in the kitchen in the wing and streamed out upon a bare yard.

"The horse will stand," said Mr. Ryle, leading him up to a hitching post, "will you go in?"

"Oh, no; I prefer to sit here," she said excitedly not feeling equal to meeting another stranger to-night.

She looked out watching him as he emerged into the light. It was pleasant to see his face again after the long darkness. He ascended the two steps and knocked loudly at the door. There was a sound as of a chair being moved upon a bare floor and then the door was opened; in the doorway stood a tall boy with a lamp in his hand. He was very tall and broad-shouldered, with a dark, thin, grave face, with very black hair piled away from a fine forehead; his voice as he replied to Mr. Ryle arrested and riveted her attention; it was a self-contained voice; she would recognize the voice, should she hear it again, more readily than the face. Could that be Mr. Ryle's friend, John Gray? She would be disappointed if he were not. So intent was she in watching his face and thinking of his voice that she did not listen to the conversation.

"If I can't find one to fit, I'll mend yours," she heard him say.

Mr. Ryle came to the carriage to speak to her.

"Will you come in and get warm? There's no one up but John. He was sitting up to study."

"I'm not cold, thank you."

In a few moments John came out with a lantern and went into the stable.

Through the open kitchen door Electa saw the blaze from a wood fire, and a pile of books upon the table. How many homes there were far away from her home! God's world was a wide place; she was beginning not to be afraid to be out in it. The world was His large house, and He was the Father in it. While her eyes were searching the pleasant kitchen John returned with the lantern and something in his hand.

"It will just fit," she heard Mr. Ryle exclaim after a busy moment, in which he adjusted the trace while John held the lantern.

"Are you coming back to-night?"

"Yes, immediately; I am not going far."

"Then I will have this mended for you; it will save you the trouble of returning ours."

"It is good to find a friend such a night as this; your light shone out upon us like a good deed in a naughty world. Do you know who says that?"

"Shakspeare. He says about every thing."

"John, I wish you to know my friend here, Electa Given, and I wish her to know you; suppose you consider this a friendship?"

John touched his threadbare cap; Electa bowed. She wondered if he had caught a glimpse of her face. The light from the lantern flashed over his face as he stood in the background; it was a sensitive, shy face; a proud face, people who misunderstood him would call it; she felt so sorry for him. What a lonely little boy he must have been! What a lonely big boy he must be now!

"Will you take this lantern, Mr. Ryle?" he asked, stepping towards them as Mr. Ryle seated himself in the buggy and took the reins from Electa's hand.

"Yes, I believe I will," he said; "put it in."

"He came to the buggy and set it down between Mr. Ryle's feet. The light from it shone over Electa,—brown veil, bright shawl, and flushed, sympathetic face. Both smiled as the gray eyes met the blue.

Years afterward he told her that he had never forgotten her first kind look.

"Don't you suppose that he will ever find any one to belong to?" she asked, as they turned into the road.

"I doubt it. He belongs to himself; like Napoleon he is his own ancestor. Now, Electa, our adventure is over without any adventure, and we have the added safeguard of this lantern. Are you anxious to reach the end of your journey?"

"I was, but I am not now; I have left a certainty for an uncertainty. I did want to stay in that pretty room to-night. Is it far now?"

"Not more than a mile."

"Mother said that Cousin Patty was rather still and queer, she would not talk at all; mother was there but a few hours; but when I asked her about Cousin Jane she only smiled, and said that I must find out for myself. So I expect that she's *very* queer and mamma didn't like to tell me."

"Then I will not tell you, either."

"Is she cross? Will she be sharp to me?"

"She is capable of it, if you give her occasion. She is strong willed."

"She must have been to shut herself up for her sister's sake. I have been thinking; I want to ask you a question, if I may."

"Ask a dozen, if you please," he returned encouragingly. If Mr. Ryle's tone were not so courteous, his words would often have seemed abrupt.

"I want to ask you this: how may I know when God speaks to me?"

"You know that He speaks to you in the Bible; God's *word* we call it, His word to you. Christ is God's word; all that Christ is in Himself is the word of God to you. Christ is God speaking."

Electa pondered; then she spoke very earnestly.

"But is every word in the Bible meant for me. Is every command spoken to me?"

"God said to Noah, 'Come thou and all thy house into the ark.' Is that spoken to you?"

"No; that's impossible."

"And the Lord said unto Abraham, 'Get out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father's house.' Is that spoken to you?"

"That is what I am doing now."

"Are you doing it because God said it to Abraham?"

"No; oh, no, indeed," she replied with a little laugh.

"God said to Hagar, 'What aileth thee, Hagar? Is that spoken to you?'"

"No sir."

"God spoke in Samuel's ear; is that spoken to you?"

"No; but I wish that He would speak in my ear."

"The Lord spoke to Paul on his way to Damascus; is that spoken to you?"

"No."

"Then a command given to an individual as an individual is intended for that individual and not intended for you."

"I understand that now."

"Still any command of God revealing the mind of God as to the thing to be done under certain circumstances may be a guide to you in like circumstances. If you were in doubt what to do, and God delayed to answer your prayer, you would not go to a pretended witch to learn what would happen to you; God's command concerning such people has made plain to you that He holds them in abhorrence. Whenever God speaks He means to teach something; what He said to Abraham, to Samuel, to Noah teaches you what God is Himself, and He speaks always to teach you about Himself, as well as to teach you about yourself."

"I think I understand," she said slowly. "I need not go into the ark, or offer up my son, or leave my country, or fight the Philistines, and I am not sent to Cornelius, like Peter, or to the Macedonians, like Paul."

"There are many commands given to nations as nations. Are you commanded to follow the pillar

of fire or the cloud? To build the tabernacle or the temple? To pray that your flight be not in winter?"

"No."

"You are not a nation, you are not one of the individuals composing that nation. The ceremonial law was meant at that time for that people; it is not wrong for you to eat pork, to wear a garment made of linen and wool; you are not unclean if you touch the dead; you are not commanded to sacrifice a lamb for your sins; you need not give a tithe of all that you possess."

"I see that; I know that."

"But among those old laws God makes known His hatred of particular sins, the sins that He hates in you; among them you will find: 'Thou shalt not raise a false report.' That is meant for all people in all ages. 'Thou shalt not oppress a stranger.' 'Ye shall keep my Sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary.' As long as God has Sabbaths and sanctuaries we must remember that. Oh, the loving-kindness there is in the law! Ye shall not oppress a stranger! Do you see how He loves strangers, little stranger?"

Electa's throat was choking and her eyes full.

"You are not living under the old covenant, but under the new covenant, under the promise of forgiveness through the blood of Christ; you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, and any command addressed to a disciple of Jesus Christ is addressed to you; any command, any promise, any warning,

any threatening given to the children of God as His children, in the Old Testament or the New, is given to you; it is God's voice speaking to you. The Lord does not bid you look in the fish's mouth for silver as He bade Peter; but fishing was Peter's usual way of getting money; so you may learn, not what money may come to you without exertion, but that God expects you to do your work to get money, as Peter did his, and that when you do your part He will do His. He does not bid you come to Him on the water, as He bade Peter; but should He bid you do any thing as impossible, like Peter, you must try. You are not Peter, you are Electa Given; and sometimes when He speaks to Peter He means only Peter, as that night on the water, He meant Peter only, and not James or John; but sometimes when He speaks to Peter, He means you and all His other disciples. When He told Peter to forgive his brother seventy times seven, He meant you and me also. He does not bid you follow a man bearing a pitcher of water and to prepare the passover, but He bids you learn from this how His care and knowledge extend to all; how He counted that man's footsteps, so that he should be on that spot at that particular moment; He knew that he would take a pitcher and not any thing else to carry the water, so He knows all your steps and every thing that you take into your hand. You are not to go to St. Paul, and take his cloak and his parchments, as he bade Timothy do; but you are to present your

body a living sacrifice, as St. Paul bids you, and all Christians do. You can not receive Phœbe, greet Mary, salute Andronicus and Junia, or Tryphena and Tryphosa, or Urbane or Herodian, or do any thing for the household of Narcissus, as St. Paul bids the Romans; but you can greet Christians lovingly, all the Marys and Phœbes and Urbanes that you find out in the world."

"I do begin to understand; it is clear to me," said Electa joyfully.

"Sometime we will have a talk about how God speaks to us by His Spirit and His providences. You will see that God speaks every hour to each of us."

Her cheeks burned with the remembrance of her thoughts about the light in the hall and that foolish, ignorant way of opening the Bible at random. How could she ever have done such a thing?

"Mr. Ryle," she said, after a moment, in a husky voice, "why does God let us make mistakes and do foolish things?"

"That is one of His methods of teaching. We do not know ourselves, we must be taught about ourselves. It is not enough to tell us that we are foolish and ignorant and weak, we must be made to feel it, to acknowledge it. Did God never teach you any thing by allowing you to make a mistake?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. And I feel so hurt, so humiliated to think that I could do such things."

"A little child learns to walk carefully by being permitted to run alone and fall down; by reason

of use we grow. If you have learned His lessons, then God has spoken to you through your mistakes; He has spoken, anyway, whether you have learned or not. He was speaking while you were thinking that He was silent towards you. He is always speaking, and always listening.

“‘Of all idolatry the sum
Is worshipping a God both deaf and dumb.’

I worship a God who speaks—do you?”

“I know He speaks; but I haven’t learned how to listen yet.”

“You are learning.”

“Yes, I am learning,” she said, thinking that God *was* speaking to her in all that bewildered, unhappy time, and she had been too confused, too full of herself to listen. She could not talk so easily with the light revealing her face and his; in the darkness, he had been a spiritual presence, she could speak to his heart; but his face was a little strange to her still. After a lengthened pause she said, “Will it rain to-morrow? I want the sun to shine.”

“I think it will rain.”

“I don’t like to think of to-morrow. I wonder if I can get to the post-office.”

“There will be no need. Your letters will come to Walnut Grove?”

“Yes; mother decided that that would be best.”

“John Gray will be glad to bring them to you as long as he remains where he is.”

"I don't like to trouble him."

"Ask him in and talk to him about books, and he will be more than repaid. Not to-morrow, but the day after, no that will be Sunday; you can not have a letter until Monday night; the stage arrives at half past five."

"Not till Monday night?" she said in a tone of quiet endurance, wondering how she could go to sleep so many nights without her letter.

"Do you see that light, back from the road, at your right, upstairs and down at the back of the house? That is your destination."

For one moment she shut her eyes, she was not quite ready to be there; the journey had seemed long, but the end had come suddenly; then with a shiver all along her nerves she unclosed her eyes and looked; there it stood, her prison, her dungeon. A harmless looking brick house of three stories, standing upon a slight eminence back from the road!

"It is a double house, there's a wide hall in the centre with large rooms upon either side, very few of them are used, I believe, the others are locked up; there's a sitting-room and kitchen in use downstairs and their sleeping room upstairs. If they would open the windows and let in the light it would be the cheeriest house around. Dr. Requa says that when he was a young man that house was the life of the neighborhood. Report says that he was once engaged to Miss Jane."

"Is he married now?"

"Yes, to a lady many years his junior—Isabel Grace was thirty and he was nearly sixty when he married her."

Isabel Grace! That must be Queen Isabel. How people's lives were interwoven!

"I hardly know how to get in; the large iron gate is never opened, so that I can not drive in, and I fear that I can not find a hitching post anywhere. I can not leave the horse. I don't want to let you go in alone."

"I *can* do it," she said bravely.

"You may take the lantern; you couldn't stumble up that path alone and in the dark. I know the way so well that I do not need it; I took it for your sake more than for mine. Are you cold, or tired, or wet?"

"No; I am not any thing."

"I want to go in, too; I'll find some place to hitch, I'll leave you at the gate, and see what I can do."

The small, rickety, front gate had been left open; she stood near it while he looked around for the place to hitch his horse.

The rain fell upon her face as she stood trembling, leaning against the gate-post; it was pleasant to feel its coolness on her burning cheeks—it was the touch of a friend; the rain in this strange country was like the rain at home. Having found what he sought, lantern in hand, with his hat pressed down over his forehead, Mr. Ryle came back to her. With her arm within that of her old

new friend, the oldest friend she had within a hundred miles, she walked up the long path to the house. All the front of the house was dark.

"There are several steps here, and a long piazza, handsome double doors, and a big brass knocker. I shall disturb her if I knock; you stand on the piazza, and I'll go around to the back of the house and find some one to open the door for you."

"Very well," she assented.

Standing there in the dark on the piazza, a wet, trembling little figure, faint-hearted enough to sink to the ground, she moaned: "Please make me a blessing to this house; I don't know how to do it myself."

Very soon, too soon, there were slow steps in the hall, and then a fumbling and fussing at the door.

"Push," cried a voice inside, a quavering voice, but with a tone of command in it.

Electa pushed, the door opened suddenly, and she stood face to face with—somebody. Not Cousin Jane, it could not be Cousin Jane, for Cousin Jane was tall and sharp and thin, with a sharp face and a sharp voice, and her dress was ugly and—This figure was tall and full and as straight as an arrow, with the sweetest, dearest, old face, with soft brown eyes, and white hair curling about the forehead; her dress was dark gray, of some plain material, not trimmed at all, closely fitting, with a white linen ruffle at the throat; the abundant white hair was not covered with a cap, but

arranged in a heavy French twist; the hair that had escaped at her neck curling as prettily as it curled over her forehead. She stood with her hands folded looking down at Electa. She saw a troubled face with a perplexed, grieved look in her eyes.

Electa could not speak. She would give anything if this were Cousin Jane.

"My poor little girl, did you come in the storm?" exclaimed the old lady, taking Electa into her arms.

"I wish that you were Cousin Jane," faltered Electa.

"Why, who else should I be? Did you think that I was Patty?"

"I thought you were a neighbor," laughed Electa hysterically; "I am so glad that you are Cousin Jane."

"Poor little, storm-beaten bird, come in and be warm and safe."

And for the second time that night Electa felt safe.

"How is Cousin Patty?"

"Almost gone home," said the sweet, quavering voice.

"I am so sorry."

"And I am so glad; she has been homesick over half a century."

Miss Westlake closed the door, locked and bolted it, while Electa stood still, looking around. The hall was dimly lighted by two candles in tall brass candlesticks standing upon a round table, the broad

stairs were covered with a bright, dark carpet, two large dark doors on each side of the hall were closed, at the end of the hall a door stood open revealing a lighted room.

"I shall not have the heart-ache from loneliness any longer," said Miss Westlake. "I have been thirty years in persuading Patty to let me have somebody with me, and once persuaded she was as eager as I to have you come."

Mr. Ryle came towards them from the lighted room. "I suppose that I may go now, you have no further need of me."

"I suppose I must let you go. How can I thank you, Mr. Ryle?"

"By being as happy as you can. Was Dr. Requa here to-night, Miss Westlake?"

"Yes; I sent for him. I knew that it would do no good, but I want to think that I did all I could for her. Electa, go into the sitting-room, I'll be down presently," said Cousin Jane.

"Isn't she lovely?" cried Electa enthusiastically, following Mr. Ryle into the sitting-room. "And what a comfortable old room this is! Every thing in it looks a hundred years old."

"They have furnished it for you, I see; it was very unlike this the last time I called. Jane has favored every whim of her sister's, and one whim was never to change any thing. That clock has stood in that corner fifty years. But I must go; I'll come in to-morrow. Miss Jane may have need of my services; good-night."

"Good-night, and thank you again," said Electa.

"I'll go out as I came in," said Mr. Ryle, taking up his lantern.

"Tell your mother that I am glad I came."

"It was none too soon, if she has waited thirty years for you."

Mr. Ryle opened a door into another lighted room, and left Electa alone, standing before the Franklin. The clock struck eleven as she stood there looking down into the wood fire; as the last stroke sounded Cousin Jane's footsteps were on the stairs.

"It is all over, she is gone," she said quietly, coming to Electa's side; "my long watch is over. Electa, can you keep a secret? will you promise never to tell?"

"Yes'm," said Electa wonderingly.

"All these years my sister has been out of her mind. I shut myself up with her that no one might know it; she was always quiet, she had nothing worse than ugly, stubborn fits, and sometimes she would almost seem like herself. I was never afraid of her, but I had to keep her a little afraid of me. She would pretend not to listen while I read the Bible, but I read it to her every day, and made her kneel down while I prayed. I should have married and had a happy home, but for that; but no one could have taken my place to her. Poor Patty! She used to be so full of life. 'I *want* to go to heaven,' she said last night. Now you must go to bed; the neighbors

will do it all, and I'll sleep with you if you will let me."

"May I stay here till it's all done?" asked Electa, with a frightened look. Oh, for mamma or Celia to be close to her; but to be in this strange house with this strange face and that strange, dead presence upstairs was as much as she could bear for the moment.

"You haven't taken off your things," said Miss Westlake laying her hand on Electa's shoulder.

"Must I?" she said, and then she laughed nervously. What a poor comforter she was!

Slowly she took off hat and veil, unpinned her shawl, unbuttoned her waterproof, and laid them on a worn horse-hair sofa. She had not waited to rebraid her hair; she looked like a little girl as she stood before the fire in her short, brown dress, high boots, and long hair.

"The little girl that came in the storm," thought Miss Westlake, "the little girl that has come to me, instead of the home I might have had years ago."

A rush-bottomed rocker stood in the centre of the room; Electa moved it nearer the fire, saying, "Won't you sit down and rest? You have not rested much lately."

"Not for forty years, child, as I shall rest to-night," said the old lady dropping herself into it. She leaned her elbow upon one of its arms and hid her face in her hand. In one corner near the fireplace was placed the sofa; Electa curled herself

up among her wrappings, and sat with her face toward the fire. She could not see Miss Westlake's face, she thought it an intrusion even to glance towards her. Cousin Jane had had but this one sister all these years, and now she had not any one in the world—no one but herself! Cousin Jane was old and she was young; with the new love came a sense of ownership and protection; the mother-love was strong in Electa's heart; this love had hardly been a part of her love for Vail and Guy and Baby, because they had mamma; it was strange that the first time—the first time since she had loved dolls—that the love should be awakened by one more than half a century older than herself. But Cousin Jane *needed* her. Electa could love any living thing that had need of her. In this thing the love in her heart was like God's love.

Drowsily she heard the clock strike twelve; she was asleep with her head upon her shawl and one hand thrown above her head.

"Oh, child, child!" half sobbed Miss Westlake, bending over her, "how can I ever let you go? Now that I have you, must I ever let you go?"

"Mamma," cried Electa, half awaking and starting up.

"It's only me, dear, Cousin Jane. How you have slept! every thing is done; we can go upstairs now. I don't deserve such kind neighbors. The things they have sent me will feed us for a week. And they have made all the arrangements. I hope

you will like your room; Patty did so enjoy fixing it up."

Not fully awake, but walking as in a dream, Electa followed Miss Westlake up the broad stairs and through a long, dark, carpeted hall. She only noticed that her room was cosey and comfortable, and only felt that she was not forced to sleep alone.

And Miss Westlake slept, with her care all taken away, and the warm, young breath close to her cheek. Even so late, if she would take it so, God was giving her the desire of her heart—a child to love and to love her.

And so ended Electa's first day out in the world.



IX.

A LONG DAY.

Electa awoke and found herself alone; for one bewildered instant she wondered where she was; there was not one familiar thing in the room. The whitewashed walls were cracked and broken in many places, the one window was curtained with white dotted muslin bordered by a deep frill and tied back to a brass knob by a piece of very faded green ribbon; on the dark washstand was a toilet set of blue and white, at the foot of the red high-posted bedstead stood a secretary, the upper half filled with books, the lower half being composed of drawers. On the odd little round table near the head of the bed were piled a variety of queer looking things; among them she noticed a small china cup and saucer, a bead pin-cushion, a large feather fan, and a silk needle book. On the walls several pictures had been placed, some of the frames were of much worn gilt, others were of dark carved wood; one of the pictures represented a tomb overhung by a huge weeping willow, leaning over the tomb were three figures,—a man and

two women; the women wore deep black bonnets and long black veils, on the tomb was inscribed:

"IN MEMORY OF
Wife and Mother,"

with age and date of death. The other pictures were landscapes, and one view of the sea. The bureau was crowded with various ornaments, among them she singled out a string of gold beads. The carpet was new and bright, alternately striped with white, red, yellow, and green, and the two braided mats, one before the bed and one in front of the bureau, were new and fresh. Poor Cousin Patty had done all this for her! This little room had been waiting for her while she had lingered, and Patty had died. But she could not have done any thing for her; she would hardly have dared to come had she known that she was "queer." The shutters were open and the rain was pattering against the small panes. Out of the window the fields were bare and wet, there were trees in the distance, but not one house. The odor of beef-steak and coffee came up to her, but there was not a sound in the house.

At home how busy it was! Vail was shouting or singing, papa's voice was calling to some one, mamma and Baby were in the dining-room, Celia was picking things up in the parlor, the girls and Guy were around everywhere, and oh, how cheery and talkative it would be at the breakfast-table.

The tears were almost dropping on the little old-



fashioned pillow when she aroused herself and almost shook herself into behaving. There were voices in the hall below, footsteps and the opening and closing of the street door. She arose slowly and began to dress; the excitement of coming being over, there seemed nothing left now but to endure, and then there were the long days and nights before a letter could come. A Bible had been placed among the treasures on the table, the cover was defaced, the type small, outwardly and at the first inward glance there was nothing about it like home. Bible words and Bible truths were a part of home to her. She opened at random; words that she had never seen attracted her: "Ye shall offer at your own will." Offer what? And to whom? "A sacrifice, a peace-offering, a free-will offering unto the Lord." The words were in Leviticus, it was a part of the old law; Mr. Ryle had said: "Oh, the loving-kindness of the law!"

"It shall be perfect to be accepted, there shall be no blemish therein," she read. Eagerly she read on: "Ye shall not offer unto the Lord that which is bruised, or crushed, or broken, or cut;" and further on: "And when ye will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving unto the Lord, offer it at your own will."

With the open book in her hand, half dressed, she stood thinking, determining as a light flashed all over her face, that her sacrifice, offered at her own free will, a sacrifice of thanksgiving, should not be given in a spirit crushed, bruised, or broken,

and the face that she brought to the glass over the bureau, after its bath of cold water was all aglow, very unlike the face that had been pressed so short a time since to the pillow that was almost wet.

"Bless your heart!" ejaculated Cousin Jane, as she entered the sitting-room. "I wouldn't eat with them, I waited for you. You can't think how it stirs me up to have folks going and coming."

There was no sunshine to come in at the two windows, but the shutters were broad open and the misty light was not unpleasant; across the fields there were houses and barns and two church spires to be seen, the high stone-wall was below the slope, it did not at all obstruct the view, there was not at all any oppressive sensation of being shut in or shut up, every thing was so much happier than her fears. The face that she brought inward to the breakfast-table was sunshine itself.

Already, according to her father's prophecy, she was on the way to become the happiest woman in the world. And it was because she loved God and was being made ready to receive Him. She was not yet aware of this; she did not know that it was a new thought from Him that made sunshine in her dark places.

The breakfast-table was very quaint and pretty; there were beefsteak, toast, preserved peaches, and cottage cheese, arranged in blue and white dishes of various shapes and sizes; the coffee was in a large silver urn, a cut-glass pitcher held the milk, and the sugar bowl was of old china.

"Come, dear," said Cousin Jane, "will you have coffee or milk?"

Only two of them! But once before in all her life had she been one of two at the table. Cousin Jane bent her head and asked a silent blessing. Electa bowed her head listening to her father's voice at home.

Cousin Jane's fussiness, her continual "Do have this," or, "Do take that," or, "Eat a little more," or, "Doesn't it taste good?" were somewhat trying to the girl who had all her life been let alone. When Cousin Jane cried anxiously, "Aren't you afraid that you'll fall off your chair?" it was a little too much for her serenity, she burst into a laugh that the old house had not heard for half a century. How Nan and Robin would laugh! Why, mamma would not say that even to Guy! Cousin Jane smiled; that laugh was the sweetest music that she had heard for years. Not by doing for her, but by being, would Electa bring her youth back; by being simply herself, with no care for the past and no thought for the future, except to take it as God sent it.

"If I might begin again," she sighed, as she pressed Electa to take peaches the third time.

"Why not?" urged something within her; "you are not old towards God, you are always young with Him, His *child*!"

Cousin Jane's face brightened so suddenly that Electa turned to the window to see if the sun were shining.

It seemed to Miss Westlake afterward that a new, young life began for her at that instant, for there could be no age, in the sense of decay, to one who was God's child.

"You haven't eaten much," she said anxiously, as Electa prepared to leave the table.

Outwardly it had been only beefsteak and toast and peaches and cheese to them both; inwardly they had both advanced a step in the kingdom of God. Every word spoken had been commonplace, too commonplace for me to record for you. But where two were gathered in His Name, was there not Another? That unspoken Presence was with these two always; but it was a long time before they could speak of Him; Electa, from natural shyness, Cousin Jane, because from years of constraint, she was unused to speak of what was most in her thoughts. Poor Patty had been the most uncongenial of companions.

"I always read a chapter before I wash the breakfast things," said Cousin Jane, rising; "I am reading the Bible through in course now for the fifty-fourth time. I am in Leviticus now."

"May I read to you?" asked Electa eagerly; "I would love to."

"I would love to have you. I have several sermon books that I want you to read to me, too. I have always read a sermon every Sunday."

Electa pushed the rocker near the fire for Cousin Jane, and brought a wooden box covered with carpet for herself to Cousin Jane's side. The old lady

seated herself, longing to kiss the face so near hers and to touch the long braids, but—had she ever kissed and caressed any one? It was so long ago that she had almost forgotten. Patty would never submit to be kissed. Last night Patty had made a motion to kiss her and for the first time since her face had grown old Jane had kissed it.

Electa read in a very interested tone, hoping to find, among the old laws, some word spoken to her. But there did not seem to be any thing; it must be there, she thought, only she could not find it by herself. She closed the Bible, held it in her hand, and looked into the fire. They were singing at home; would Cousin Jane like her to sing? Would she like Vail's favorite: "I am so glad that our Father in heaven"?

Cousin Jane was leaning back with her eyes closed, the tears starting from under the lids. Beginning low and sweet Electa sang one verse, watching her face now and then; the tears came streaming before the second verse was finished.

"Sing that again," she said.

She sang the second verse again:

"Though I forget Him and wander away,
Still He doth love me wherever I stray;
Back to His dear, loving arms would I flee
When I remember that Jesus loves me.

"I am so glad that Jesus loves me,
Jesus loves me, Jesus loves me;
I am so glad that Jesus loves me,
Jesus loves even me."

"Isn't there some more?" Cousin Jane asked.

So she sang the long hymn through, all the six verses.

"How that would have comforted Patty! It's years and years and years since I have heard singing. It breaks my heart. I can't bear any more to-day."

With the habit of years, as if the girl beside her were the old rebellious woman, she said soothingly: "Now kneel down and keep still."

The quick color flashed over Electa's face.

"Excuse me, child. I shall forget that you are not Patty a hundred times a day; I'm a broken down old woman; don't mind me."

The prayer was the same that she had prayed for Patty all these many years, so simple that a child of ten might understand every word. Poor Electa had but one petition: "Don't let me die of homesickness." With the familiar hymn every home association was tugging at her heart.

Cousin Jane arose and went into the kitchen for a calico apron which she put on over her gingham one.

"Where's your apron, child?"

"I only had one, and I forgot to put it in."

"Then you must make some," said Cousin Jane, decidedly, "you must make four for you and two new ones for me."

"I don't want to spend the money," answered Electa confusedly.

"I didn't intend to spend your money, not one cent; you are to take your whole hundred dollars

home. If I want to make you a present, I suppose I may."

"Oh, thank you ever so much," cried Electa, her homesickness for the moment gone to the winds.

"Now you sit down and see me wash the dishes," said Cousin Jane, rolling back the white ruffles in her sleeves.

"Then how will you know how handy I am?" laughed Electa.

"I know that well enough; I don't want you to work; I put that in to please Patty. The house will be full of people coming and going all day; I want you to see them and talk to them; it puts me out so to see people! you can't think! my head gets all in a whirl, and I don't know what I'm saying. I said yesterday, 'Oh, you are Nancy Grey,' and she up and laughed, and said that she was Nancy Grey's daughter. I'm too mixed up. I must see people by degrees and get used to it. I don't want them in here either; I want you to dust the front room opposite the parlor and kindle a fire in there, and see the people there; you can answer all the questions. I've kept the rooms dusted, and opened the windows when Patty didn't know, and the stove in that room will burn, I had a fire there three weeks ago one day when she was asleep; and, by and by, when I get used to things, we'll open all the doors and windows and build fires to dry up the house. Just now I see men like trees walking and voices confuse me so."

She could not have asked Electa to do a harder

thing; her heart beat so fast that she could not catch her breath to assent or dissent.

"I'll unlock the door for you and bring you the wood and kindlings."

"Well," said Electa slowly, wondering how she would live through it.

"They will all ask heaps of questions, but there's nothing for you to tell, except that Patty gave me every thing that belonged to her to do just as I like with, and to give to any body I choose. I want you to add up her bank-book and mine some day; we have money in three banks, I wouldn't trust it all in one. And Patty used to wear the six bank-books night and day; she was terribly afraid of robbers. I told her that our treasure was laid up in heaven, but she held those bank-books pretty tight, nevertheless. Poor Patty! The money never did her any good. I gave it all to the Lord last night: I never did care for money as some do. I spread the six bank-books before Him as Hezekiah did the letter and asked Him to spend it as pleased Him. And I guess He will, for I was in earnest. Do you want to go in and see Patty first? I want you to look at her, for she counted on your coming. And you haven't those beads on! Perhaps I didn't tell you? Those gold beads upstairs with the big gold cross fastened on them, she said she wanted to give you, and there's lots of other things all for you; I never knew her to open her heart as she did to you. There's a watch and rings and a gold chain."

"Must I keep them all?"

"Why, don't you want them?" asked Cousin Jane in surprise. "I thought that children liked trinkets."

"I'll wear the beads to remember her by, but I'd so like to give the other things to Celia and Nan and Mollie and Trude and Robin."

"Well, so you may, I suppose; they are yours to keep or give away. When I make a present I like people to do what they like with it. I'll show them to you after we get things fixed up a little. Bless your heart, child, give away all you like. When the ministers call I give them money for the church and how Patty would rage! I wouldn't deceive her, I always told her, and, poor thing, she always cried and said that she'd live to see me die in the poor-house. But she wasn't right or she wouldn't have acted so. The notions she would get! Once she tried to live without eating or drinking, and I could only manage that by threatening to run away and leave her if she wouldn't eat. And then she thought that she was too wicked to lie in a comfortable bed, and insisted upon sleeping out in the snow, and the nights I've had to lock our room doors and fasten the windows down nobody knows! But nobody knew and nobody shall know! Sometimes I've read the Bible aloud half the night to keep her quiet, and always I patted her to sleep as you pat a baby. But those queer spells didn't come often; the worst of it was I didn't know when they would come; usually she

was very good and no trouble. Sometimes she'd cry all night and all day, and I couldn't pacify her any way, but her tears are wiped away now! How often I've seen her an hour at a time on her knees, trying to collect her thoughts to pray and crying out, 'O, God, be merciful to me.' I used to sing, 'Hush, my dear,' to her, and she always liked that. I sung it last night while she was a-dying. Do you know it?

" 'Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber,
Holy angels guard thy bed.' "

" I never heard it."

" I'll say it to you sometime. I know all the hymn book and all the Psalms and James and Romans; I'll say them all to you. Patty used to like to hear me; it kept her quiet."

Cousin Jane had scraped the dishes and piled them up while she was talking.

" I'll take them out in the kitchen, and then we'll go and see Patty. You haven't seen our kitchen; do come straight out. Patty used to work in it from morning till night. You may eat all the dirt you'll find."

And certainly Electa believed that she might. No kitchen floor was ever so spotless before, no row of tins ever shone so brightly; there were four shelves filled with tins and each was as bright as silver; there seemed not to be a speck of any kind upon walls or ceiling; upon the white floor bright, home-made rugs were placed before the

dresser, before the shining stove, and one under each of the four windows, a wooden settle stood in one corner near a window; under another window a green flower-stand containing several flower-pots in which were growing with a sickly growth rose-geraniums, southernwood, nasturtiums, hops and ivy; spotless shades of white Holland adorned with crimson tassels were at the windows; on the high, white mantel were arranged four flat-irons at one end, at the other four tall brass candlesticks as bright as polishing could make them; a white pine table with four red legs, rush-bottomed chairs, and one "barrel chair" completed the furniture. Jane had made the barrel chair out of a barrel, and Patty had stuffed it with hay and covered it with gay chintz. A holder for the poker and two flat-iron holders were hanging under the mantel.

"Do you like it?" asked Miss Westlake.

"Like it! It's as neat as a cell in a beehive!" exclaimed Electa.

"We had it painted twice a year, and Patty whitewashed it twice a month all the year round; she was always working out here from morning till night. I have known her to wash this floor twice a day. I let her do any thing to keep her quiet. Work was her blessing. If it might only have been a work out among poor, needy folks, I should have been satisfied. Every Saturday she painted the hearth and the bricks behind the stove. 'Is somebody coming?' I used to say.

'No; nobody ever'll come now,' she always answered. 'I don't want any body to come now.' Somebody has come now, though," added Miss Westlake with evident satisfaction.

This was the kitchen that was being made ready for her, that was beginning to be made ready, as all her good things were, before she was born. It was so much prettier than Susie Prentiss' kitchen.

"I shall be afraid to step into it," said Electa; "it makes me feel soiled."

"The sink and the pump and the wood and coal are in the shed; that is three steps down, and there's a brick walk out to the barn and stables. When it leaves off raining you must go out and look around. Every thing is built of brick and in good repair. I've always had a carpenter come to look around and fix up things. And you must see our cow, she's as white as she can be all over; her name is Lily. I don't know what I should have done without Lily; her mother was Pet, and her grandmother Daisy. We raise our own hay, and that's all we have raised, for Patty wouldn't have men about, and I didn't want them to see her, either. All my visitors have been the butcher, the baker, the grocer, and peddling men of all sorts; there's a back gate and they find their way in. They have been a link between me and the world. Patty never saw them. The grocer was in my Sunday-school class once; he attends to all my business; his wife was here all the time Patty was sick, and he and his brother stayed here all

night last night. Now come and look out into the shed."

After the shed had been explored and every thing it contained commented upon, Miss Westlake opened the door out upon the brick walk.

"It isn't raining so very hard," she exclaimed, holding out her hand; "put on your shawl and come out and see Lily. Patty kept her as slick as if she were a horse."

They found the beautiful white creature eating her breakfast of hay. Miss Westlake went to her, smoothing her neck lovingly. "Patty has gone," she said half to herself, "she will never be unhappy any more."

"You ought to have a horse, Cousin Jane," said Electa; "it's a pity for some horse not to have such a good home."

"A horse! What for? I don't go anywhere. And I don't want a boy around; I don't want any body but you."

Electa went out into the rain again, thinking: "But I want somebody beside *you*."

"There's a mat in the shed, wipe your feet, child."

Electa obeyed with a resentful flush upon her cheeks; she might be small for her age, but she did not like to be treated like a child.

"Now we'll go in and see Patty," proposed Miss Westlake, as they re-entered the kitchen; "hang your shawl on that hook over the settle."

Miss Westlake took a bunch of large keys from

the top shelf of the chimney closet in the sitting-room saying, "Come."

Electa went reluctantly; but how could she refuse to look upon the face of one who had watched for her coming? She hoped that it was not wicked to be glad that she had come too late to live with Patty, for she felt that she could not have stayed one hour under the same roof with her. It was not wicked to be thankful that it had not been required of her.

Miss Westlake unlocked one of the large dark doors, opened it and went into the parlor.

"This is our best parlor," she whispered.

Electa lingered on the threshold as long as she could. The little white sheeted figure was so still. There was no need now to keep her "quiet."

"She was the littlest thing, not as big as you; it was a mercy to me that she *was* little. Poor little Patty," she added tenderly, folding the sheet away from the face.

It was a little face, thin and wrinkled, with the iron-gray hair brushed down smooth on each side of the face; the eyes were sunken, the lips withered and fallen in; the small, bony hands were folded over her breast. On the marriage finger Electa noticed a worn, plain gold ring.

"That ring! yes, she always wore it; it was heavy enough when it was first put on, but he married some one else and died soon after, and she always would wear the ring. It was a sad story; some people do have sad stories. Life is

just the same all over, I guess. I suspect that there are sad stories out among folks now, just as there were then."

Electa thought of Celia. Why could not Cousin Patty have been brave like her?

"It's *in* some folks to break down," continued Miss Westlake, covering the face again; "they don't have any thing to take to instead. It seems to me there's plenty; when one thing is taken there's always another. You see Patty was taken, and you were given right away. Perhaps things come to them that expect; I was always expecting, but Patty never would."

The shutters were tightly closed, not one ray of light strayed through a crevice anywhere; the only light in the room came from the long, narrow window over the doors in the hall.

Glancing around timidly, Electa saw dark, carved furniture covered with linen, pictures upon the walls, ornaments upon the mantel; the carpet seemed soft and bright.

"I like to come into this room. If it hadn't been for seeing so many people, I'd have had the funeral here, but it's going to be in the church, and I needn't go unless I want to. I've had many good times in this room; father and mother were lively folks and wanted us to have a good time. This furniture is silk patchwork and worsted-work and all kinds of pretty things; we did it for Patty's house that she never had. I used to like to talk over old times, but Patty never would; she couldn't

remember very well; sometimes she didn't know who I was. Sometimes for days and days and days she wouldn't speak one word. She used to wander and wander and wander around inside the stone-walls; when she was first taken, she used to run away and take long walks, miles and miles, so I had to watch her, and keep her in. Once I found her on the top of the stone-wall, so I never let her go out alone after that. I shall not miss any companionship in her. I shall miss the care. I had mapped out such a different life for myself, and you see what I've had. But it isn't too late. God never says 'too late' up in heaven, so why should I down here? Expecting things has kept my heart from breaking."

Miss Westlake locked the door again and unlocked the door in the hall opposite to it. The room contained three windows, two at the front and one at the side; the window-sills were narrow, at a considerable distance from the floor, and the panes were many and small. The curtains were of some rich, bright material; Miss Westlake unfastened the shutters and threw them open.

"There are houses," cried Electa joyfully, standing at one of the front windows.

"Did you think that we lived in the woods?"

"Almost; is that Walnut Grove?"

"Yes; and in the third story you can see Swanzey."

The carpet on this floor was a worn ingrain, yellow, blue, red and green figures running into each other, the chairs were cane-seated, there were

two tables, one under the long mirror in the pier, the other in a corner; on the table in the corner were piled books and various ornaments; on the mantel stood a clock with peacock's feathers arranged before it, tall vases filled with dried grasses, and two silver candlesticks; a horse-hair rocker, the back covered with a white tidy, was placed near the window in the chimney corner.

"Mother used to sit there and look down the road," said Miss Westlake; "her knitting work is in that table drawer, just as she left it; father's spec's are there, too. Now, I'll bring you the wood and things, and you make a fire and sit here and wait for callers. I'll give you a duster and you may dust."

"Mayn't I wash the dishes first?" she asked eagerly.

"No, I'll do that; you might break some of them."

"I won't break the stove," said Electa, trying to smile; "let me get the wood and kindlings, I know where they are."

"Well, I don't care," she answered moving away.

Something was perverse, either the wood or the draught, or perhaps Electa did not know how to make a fire, for the fire smoked instead of burning to a flame, and the third time that she opened the stove door to see if it were burning there was not one spark of fire. What would Cousin Jane think of her? The kindlings were burned out, and she must go through the kitchen into the wood-shed to find others. There had been a step in the hall;

it might be that Cousin Jane had gone upstairs. Was she all alone down-stairs? She arose from her knees, brushed the dirt off her fingers, and opened the door into the hall, glancing with paled cheeks towards the locked door across the hall. Then, almost with a bound she passed it, hurried through sitting-room and kitchen, and returned with shavings and kindling wood. This time it must burn—if it did not it would be very childish to cry; but before she knew it her eyes were full and overflowing. Cousin Jane could speak sharply, and she did not want to hear her speak sharply. No one had ever been sharp to her. But the smoke puffed out into her face, the shavings blazed a moment and died out, the wood would not kindle.

There was smut upon her fingers, and tears and smut upon her face, shavings and bits of kindling were strewn upon the oil-cloth, under the stove and around it, and when the door was pushed softly open two minutes later, she was sitting on the carpet in front of the stove, with her head in her hands, crying as hard as she could cry.

She heard the step and without raising her head sobbed: "Oh, Cousin Jane, the fire won't burn."

As Cousin Jane made no response, she dropped her hands and lifted her head; instead of Cousin Jane's placid face, she met a pair of laughing, gray eyes.

"The fire won't burn," he repeated in exactly her tone; "excuse me for laughing at your grief,

but it's very queer to cry when the fire won't burn."

"It wasn't all that," said Electa, rising slowly and looking very much ashamed.

"Didn't you hear us? We have brought your trunk, the stage driver and I. Mrs. Morris sent me to inquire, and, as the stage was passing, I jumped in; we brought the trunk on the piazza, but I came around to the back door for fear of making too much noise."

"How did you know the way?"

"I have always known the way; I used to bring groceries here when I was in Mr. Truman's store. Miss Jane knows me like a book. Are you glad to have your trunk, Miss Electa?"

"Yes, thank you," she said.

She wanted to say, "I am glad to have *you*;" for, oh, it did seem so good to see somebody *young*, to hear such a young voice and such young, light talk. She did not know before how very old and grave and far beyond her Cousin Jane was, and Mr. Ryle and his mother. This voice and face and manner were bringing back herself and taking away that old, responsible feeling that had been weighing her down; all the world was not old; she was young still, and living among young life. Since yesterday morning she had been feeling so old; it was so delightful to be little-girl-ish enough to cry because the fire would not burn. Not that Electa thought all this, she felt it in a vague, relieved way; she felt that somehow every thing was

not so dreadful; that first feeling of companionship with John Gray she never lost. He was to her what the first new moon after her trouble had been to Celia; the new moon came to Celia in a flash of grateful surprise; she exclaimed to herself, "Oh, I thought there would never be a new moon again."

But there will always be new moons and young companionship as long as God does not grow old. The world will be always new and young to those who, like Cousin Jane, are "expecting things."

"Then I'll open the door and bring it in," he answered, amused at the light and color in her face. "I was afraid you were grown up; I didn't know that you were such a little girl. Are you fifteen?"

"No."

"Fourteen?"

"No."

"Thirteen, then?"

"No, indeed."

"You can't be twelve?"

"No, I can't."

"Then you must be sixteen."

"No, I am not."

"I see that I'm not good at guessing; I'll give up. I brought you one of Mr. Ryle's books, the first that I picked up. It's grand," he exclaimed enthusiastically, taking a small volume from his breast pocket.

"*'Pollok's Course of Time,'*" she said, turning

the leaves. "I would like to read it all; I have dipped into it, but now I'll read it thoroughly. I shall have a great deal of time to read."

"I wish I could say that. May I kindle the fire for you?"

"Oh, thank you, if you will. I never kindle fires at home."

"This room is too chilly for you; go out to the fire, and I'll come and tell you when it burns."

"Then perhaps you'll never come; she answered gravely, moving towards the door with Pollok in her hand.

"I wouldn't like to spend my life in this room, or in this house," said John, kneeling before the stove and opening the stove door. "I want to travel everywhere; books of travel set me wild."

"I would rather stay home and read them than go travelling," said Electa.

"I'll travel, and write my book for you then," he returned in a careless tone, as the deep color flushed cheek and brow. It was the first time that he had ever spoken aloud the words: "Write my book." But how he was dreaming about it night and day.

Electa went out, closing the door softly. The breakfast dishes were still piled unwashed upon the table; she hesitated, and then decided to wash them. It would be something to prove to Cousin Jane that she would not break them. But where were the dish-pan and towels and soap? It would be better not to do it at all than not to do it ex-

cellently. She might take the dishes into the kitchen, there would be no risk in doing that. With nervous step and hands somewhat unsteady she carried the plates and cups and saucers into the kitchen and put them on the table, smiling at herself for her nervousness; at home she was not afraid of doing any thing. She went back, and taking coffee urn, sugar bowl, and milk pitcher into her hands had turned towards the kitchen door, when a light step touched the stairs; hastening towards the kitchen she stumbled, her right hand instinctively moved to protect herself—there was a shock, a crash, the pretty glass pitcher lay in several pieces upon the carpet, the milk had spattered her face, her dress and the carpet.

"Oh, *dear!*" she almost screamed, "oh, *dear me!*" and for the second time within fifteen minutes burst into tears. At that instant Miss Westlake opened the door.

"Why, child, what ails you? What have you done? Broken my mother's pitcher? I thought that you'd break something; but never mind, poor dear, don't cry about it. You shall break all the dishes in the house, if you'll be good and not cry."

"I don't want to," exclaimed Electa, half laughing. "I don't want to break another one. Do you want me to go home, because I can't do any thing? I couldn't make the fire burn, either; John Gray is kindling the fire."

"John Gray! In that room! Did he wipe his feet? What did you let him do it for?"

"My trunk is on the piazza; but I'll go home, Cousin Jane, if you don't want me to stay any longer. I can find somebody else to come." She was half stooping over the broken pitcher with the coffee urn and sugar bowl still in her hand, milk and tears were mingled upon her cheek.

"Go home! I'd like to see you go home! I'll pick up the pieces; it's no matter about the pitcher, these are my commonest dishes; I'll show you my china closet some day. Perhaps you are a bit nervous; go and sit down and don't do another thing to-day."

"I want to help," said Electa humbly.

"I'll show you how I wash dishes then; set those things in the closet in this room."

"Good morning, Miss Jane!"

It was John Gray's voice and he was laughing again. Electa hurried into the kitchen, she would have closed the door had she not felt it to be rude.

"I want some matches, please."

"Don't step on this glass."

Those voices she had heard for the first time only last night. She went to the flower-stand, they could not see her there, and picked a leaf of the rose-geranium and crushed it in her fingers. Celia loved the fragrance of the rose-geranium, it was always about her; as she pressed the leaf Celia was close beside her. If she could, she would have given her hundred dollars for a letter from Celia, but, oh, how long she must wait.

"Lecty!" called Miss Westlake, "don't you want

your trunk brought in and taken upstairs? John and I will take it upstairs."

"I can do it myself," said John, "as soon as the fire burns, if you'll show me the way."

"Please," said Electa from the kitchen.

She had wiped half the dishes before the fire was kindled and the trunk taken up to her room.

"May I come again, Miss Jane?" John stopped to ask, as he passed through the kitchen.

"Yes, as often as you like; you don't make any noise or any trouble," said Miss Westlake encouragingly.

As soon as the dishes were put away Electa hastened upstairs to open her trunk. It had been set under the window; she liked to have it there because she might kneel on it and look out the window. There was a small closet in the room, containing a shelf and several hooks. She lingered over her task of unpacking, hanging her dresses in the closet and arranging smaller articles in the drawers of the secretary. Her books were at the bottom of her trunk—her few books, her treasures. Opening "Mrs. Hemans" an envelope fell out; it was a fresh envelope, addressed to herself in Celia's familiar hand! With a little cry that would have made Celia happy all day, she tore it open. It was a long letter written the evening before she left home. And she had not had to wait for her letter. She remembered that Celia went into papa's study to write that evening, and she had felt just a little hard towards her, because she

had chosen this evening to write instead of staying with her.

It was a long, full letter, so much like Celia that it needed only her voice to make it herself. Celia could always write more easily than she could talk. Electa reread it three times and then put it into her pocket that she might have it near her all day. The last paragraph ran thus: "Papa has named your journal 'Out in God's World.' He did that for our sakes as well as yours; for when any one asks, 'Where is Electa?' we shall all think, 'She is out in God's world.' God's world is Christ's world; you remember that Christ said, 'All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.' Not only in heaven, but in earth. 'All power!' Power enough to keep you from the evil there is in the world, and power enough to give you the good there is in heaven. Look at the title of your book every day before you write a word in it. My title is as lovely as yours; did I show you mine? 'Up in God's Heart,' with the motto, 'Look up, and not down.' What an outlook and uplook we have! I forgot to tell you that I put your needle-book in the pocket of your green gingham, and I may forget to tell you in the morning. It will be a comfort to me for you to love to sew."

This was so like Celia: needle-books and lovely thoughts! She loved beautiful thoughts and she "loved" to sew.

"Lecty!" Miss Westlake was at the door, speaking breathlessly. "There are people on the piazza;

you'll have to come down. Take them in to see Patty, they'll expect it, and tell them that she was conscious to the last, and had pneumonia. Tell them that I can not see my friends to-day, and if you think they'll feel hurt if you don't ask them, why you'll have to ask them to come again."

"But I don't know them," faltered Electa.

"Oh, they are only the neighbors or people from Walnut Grove. I shouldn't think that they'd come out in the rain, but they have."

Electa's feet almost refused to stir. Would they call her "gawky" and "bashful"? And would they notice that she was lame? She had forgotten to think whether or not John Gray had noticed her lameness.

"Don't be so long, child."

Very slowly Electa stepped down the stairs; there were voices on the piazza, several voices, what *should* she say after she had said "good-morning"?

The door was opened at last, the greeting spoken and responded to, and two ladies, a gentleman, and a young girl ushered into the room where the fire had been kindled. John had swept the zinc and oil-cloth, and moved the chairs so that they appeared a little less stiff.

"How is Miss Patty?" queried one of the ladies.

"May we not see Miss Jane?" asked the other.

"Are you here alone with her?" questioned the gentleman.

"Is Miss Jane *very* crazy?" asked the young girl.

Electa could answer questions; at times she was indignant, at times confused, at times silent, many times her reply was simply: "I don't know."

But harder than all was unlocking the door, and taking them in to look curiously at the quiet face and poor, little, folded hands.

"She wasn't married!" whispered the girl; "see that ring."

Electa stood nearest her, as if she might thus shield her from the whispered comments.

"Who will have her money?" asked one of the ladies, as Electa was relocking the door.

"The one who loved her best," said Electa in a low tone.

The young girl giggled, the others said nothing. As she closed the door, not replying to their profuse thanks, she heard the girl exclaim loudly, "*Isn't* she a poky little thing? Not life enough for a mouse!"

But Cousin Jane was saved all this annoyance; that was something to think of, even if she herself had learned that she was a poky little thing.

Miss Patty's death had caused a commotion for miles around; all day people came and went. Miss Westlake refused to see any of them. Electa replied to the same questions in the same tone hour after hour, locked and unlocked that door, folded away the sheet from the unseeing, unlistening face, and stood nearest her while some looked and whispered and others looked and seemed too moved to speak.

Miss Westlake prepared dinner and they ate together silently; Miss Westlake, too flurried and excited to talk, and Electa, too wearied over the morning, and too worried over what the afternoon might bring.

In the twilight the last visitors—Electa called them the last intruders,—drove away; they had inquired Miss Patty's age, asked what her last words were, and if she felt "willing to go," were anxious to know if she had left a will, and supposed that now Miss Jane would not shut herself up any longer.

"Shut the blinds, and shut up the stove now, Lecty; and come out to supper," said Miss Westlake, appearing in the doorway.

Out of sheer fatigue Electa had dropped down on the carpet before the fire, drawing a long breath.

"You have lived through this day, and so have I; and now nobody will come to-night but the watchers."

"Some of the people were so kind and gentle and sympathetic," replied Electa rising; "they did not ask any impertinent questions, and they looked at her as if they were so sorry for her. They said they had not seen her for so long, and she had changed so."

"So have they," said Miss Westlake dryly; "they seem to forget that. Come to tea, I've made hot biscuits for you."

Electa did not love to talk; it was pleasanter to sit and dream, to think about home, to wonder

what Cousin Patty's jewels might be, and to imagine herself giving the watch to Celia, choosing a breast-pin for her mother, a diamond ring for Mollie, and—

"It seems very queer to have somebody to tea," remarked Miss Westlake. "I fussed around just as I used to."

Electa was forgetting that she was "somebody to tea," rousing herself as she was throwing the watch chain about Celia's neck, she began to talk about the first group of visitors, describing dress, manner, and conversation; Miss Westlake brightened, asking questions and speculating as to whom they might be.

"It does seem good to have somebody to talk to," she sighed, as they left the table. "Now you are tired, sit down and read over your letter while I put things away."

After the tiresome day the letter seemed doubly delicious.

Miss Westlake fastened the blinds, shutting out the sound of the rain, covered the table with a green-and-red cloth, and set two tall brass candlesticks holding tall candles in the centre of it.

"Now we'll have an evening," she said. "Patty *would* go to bed before dark."

Electa seated herself at the table; Miss Westlake moved the rush-bottomed rocker to the fire, and sat silent with her eyes closed.

"Cousin Jane."

"Well, dear?"

Miss Westlake's voice had grown mellow since last night.

"Would you like me to read you my letter?"

"Would I? I would, indeed. I used to have letters once in a while when I was a girl, and Patty has some that I must look over and burn. What a big sheet!"

"It's a foolscap. And some is written between the lines. I could recite it now from beginning to end, I really believe."

She did not read: "My little sister;" that was too precious for any one beside herself. Miss Westlake listened intently, almost intensely. It was a wonderful thing to her to be out "among folks" again; it was like being born into a new world, for the world had grown old and new again since she was young.

"But I can't begin again," she answered to something, some longing, some cry within herself; "all I can do is to go straight on."

"That's as good as a book!" she exclaimed heartily, "what a blessed thing it is to be set in a family."

"Oh, Cousin Jane," exclaimed Electa, with all her heart in her eyes, "can't you and I make a family? This house is so large and we can fill it full."

"We are a family now," returned Miss Westlake decidedly, her tone shivering Electa's enthusiasm. "I don't want any one but you, you make the house full enough for me."

Electa smoothed out the large sheet and studied the penmanship. Hawthorne once remarked that he reperused his wife's letters for the sake of the penmanship; Celia's letters were well worth reading for the sake of the penmanship. Pollok was safe in Electa's pocket; there was but one other book in the room excepting the Bible, that and the Bible were on the stand with Miss Westlake's spectacles.

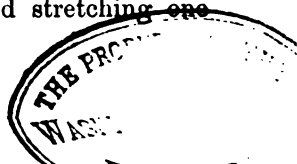
Not a bird, or a kitten, or a dog, nothing alive near her except Lily asleep in her stable, the tall clock with its solemn, ceaseless tick, the fire that blazed on its iron hearth circling in and out among the short sticks of wood, and the sweet old lady asleep in her arm-chair. Celia's letter was another live thing and the rose-geranium in the kitchen. Any thing else? Her Bible upstairs,—that was alive when God's life breathed through the words. But it was upstairs, and she dared not go upstairs alone; her writing materials also, and journal were beside it on the secretary. If she could have them the evening would not seem so long; but the two lonely halls, the long staircase! She drew Pollok from her pocket and opened to the first book. It seemed hard and uninteresting:

“Eternal Spirit! God of truth! to whom
All things seemed as they are; Thou, who of old
The prophet's eye unscaled, that nightly saw
While heavy sleep fell down on other men,
In holy vision tranced the future pass
Before him, and to Judah's—”

A soft, low, plaintive voice interrupted her. Miss Westlake had lifted her hand and was patting her own knee crooning:

"Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber,
Holy angels guard thy bed."

If the holy angels were guarding her and then, how could she be timid about going upstairs alone? With the sudden impulse she seized one of the candlesticks and darted into the hall. A shutter upstairs was blown with a bang against the casement, as her feet touched the first stair; she stifled the shriek that came to her lips, but the heavy candlestick fell and extinguished the candle; grasping the banister hard with both hands, she stood trembling, faint with a fear of she knew not what; the darkness choked her, she could not catch her breath. The front door rattled, there was a step upon the piazza—no, it was nothing, there was not a sound. Slowly lifting one foot and then another, grasping the banister with both hands, she passed up the staircase. She could find her books easily in the dark; God was out in His world, it was faithless to be afraid of any thing. Step by step, as the fear passed, each step growing lighter, she groped her way up to her room, and felt along to the little table and found her books; she stood still one moment to regain her breath, to reassure herself, to feel near to God in that room that she had knelt and prayed in twice that day; then turning, she became bewildered, and stretching one



hand before her could not reach the door. Groping hither and thither, touching now a bed-post, now the table, and now the wall, then turning to touch them all again, at last she touched the knob of a door; the door was ajar; had she closed the door or left it open? She could not remember, but it would be natural to leave it open that she might the more readily make her escape; she pushed it gently, the air seemed closer than the air of the hall; where could she be? This must be Patty's room or the other room into which her room opened; the swinging shutter banged against the window frame, then after a second, as soon as the house was still, there was another sound—a soft, stealthy movement, a noiseless, smothered step, above her, around her, or in the next room, she could not decide. Was it approaching her or moving away from her? Holding the door-knob in her hand with an unuttered cry upon her stiffening lips, she stood as still as if she did not breathe; her sharpened ears listening to the stealthy step.

“Lecty! Lecty, child! where are you?”

With a rush of life through her whole being, she sprang forward towards the voice and the light.

“Are you upstairs?” called Miss Westlake from the staircase.

Had she been upstairs for years?

“I came up for my books,” she answered in a self-controlled voice, emerging into the light, “and I think I lost my way in the dark.”

“I missed you, and noticed a candle was gone.”

"I dropped it and put it out," she said, speaking more naturally. "Do you have rats here?"

"Sometimes, did you see one?"

"In the dark?" she laughed excitedly.

"Are you sure that you locked the door where Patty is?"

"Oh, yes."

Electa picked up the candlestick and the broken candle.

"Have you bent it? Or dropped grease on the stair carpet?" inquired Miss Westlake, in a concerned voice.

How good it seemed to be in a world where she might drop grease on the stair carpet? How good to be back where the fire burned and the clock ticked. It was striking six as she went out; it was four minutes past six now!

"Are you going to write?" asked Miss Westlake disappointedly, as Electa arranged pen, ink, paper, and books upon the table.

"Not just yet."

"I want to say some hymns to you first; they will take up my mind."

"Would you like me to look on the book?"

"Oh, yes; and correct me if I make a mistake. Patty never would."

Electa was learning that she must do the things that "Patty never would."

"The hymn book is in the closet behind the blue platter; it's a little green book with my father's name printed on it."

Electa cut the broken candle in two, relighted it, and went to the closet for the hymn book. Very contentedly Miss Westlake began to recite the first hymn—

“‘There is a God, who reigns above,
Lord of the heaven and earth and seas;
I fear His wrath, I ask His love,
And with my lips I sing His praise.

“‘There is a law which He has writ,
To teach us all what we must do;
My soul to His commands submit,
For they are holy, just, and true.’”

There were five stanzas in this first hymn; she repeated it, without one mistake, in a pleasant recitative.

“Shall I go on?” she asked.

“Oh, yes; till you can’t go on any longer?”

Fifteen were recited; the listener’s interest began to flag, but not Miss Westlake’s. Electa turned to the page before the Doxologies, and learned that the last hymn was number five hundred and ninety-nine.

“I won’t say them all to-night,” smiled Miss Westlake; “it will take several evenings. Oh, how many nights I’ve said hymns till midnight. Would you like to hear a few Psalms to-night?”

Electa thought of her letter to Celia and the first, tempting blank page of her journal, but after a slight hesitancy, arose and brought the Bible to the table. Miss Westlake’s voice sank to a solemn monotone, she kept a Bible voice for her Bible

words. Electa's father read the Psalms as if he were pouring them out of his own heart.

"I expect that you are tired now," exclaimed Miss Westlake, as she finished the tenth Psalm; "read to me a little while, and then the watchers will come and we can go to bed?"

"What shall I read?"

"Any thing; what is that book close to my glasses?"

"'Moffat's Southern Africa.'"

"That will do; read anywhere."

The leaves of the book were yellowed and spotted; it had such a delightful *old* smell; Electa was not decided as to which she liked better, the delightful old smell or the delightful *new* smell of books. Turning the leaves her eyes caught the interesting sentence.—"We had travelled all day over a sandy plain, and passed a sleepless night from extreme thirst and fatigue." This appeared exciting; she laid the book upon the table, and resting her head upon her hand, began to read in a lively, story-telling voice.

"Rising early in the morning, and leaving the people to get the wagon ready to follow, I went forward with one of our number to see if we could not perceive some indications of water, by the foot-marks of game; for it was in a part of the country where we could not expect the traces of man. After passing a ridge of hills and advancing a considerable way on the plain, we discovered at a distance a little smoke rising amidst a few

bushes which seemed to skirt a ravine. Animated with the prospect, we hastened forward, eagerly anticipating a delicious draught of water, no matter what the quality might be. When we had arrived within a few hundred yards of the spot we stood still, startled at the fresh marks of lions which appeared to have been there only an hour before us. We had no guns, being too tired to carry them, and we hesitated for a moment whether to proceed or return. The wagon was yet distant and thirst impelled us to go on; but it was with caution, keeping a sharp lookout at every bush we passed. On reaching the spot we beheld an object of heart-rending distress. It was a venerable looking old woman, a living skeleton, sitting with her head leaning on her knees. She appeared terrified at our presence, and especially at me. She tried to rise, but, trembling with weakness, sank again to the earth. I addressed her by the name that sounds sweet in every clime and charms even the savage ear—"Why, mother, fear not; we are friends and will do you no harm." I put several questions to her, but she appeared either speechless or afraid to open her lips. I again repeated: "Pray, mother, who are you, and how came you to be in this situation?" To which she replied: "I am a woman; I have been here four days; my children have left me here to die."

"Your children?" I interrupted.

"Yes," raising her hand to her shrivelled bosom, "my own children, three sons and two

daughters. They are gone," pointing with her finger, "to yonder blue mountain, and have left me to die."

"“And pray why did they leave you?” I inquired.

"“Spreading out her hands, “I am old, you see, and I am no longer able to serve them; when they kill game I am too feeble to help in carrying home the flesh; I am not able to gather wood to make a fire; and I can not carry their children on my back as I used to do.”

"“This last sentence was more than I could bear; and, though my tongue was cleaving to the roof of my mouth for want of water, this reply opened a fountain of tears. I remarked that I was surprised that she had escaped the lions which seemed to abound and to have approached very near the spot where she was. She took hold of the skin of her left arm with her fingers, and raising it up as one would do a loose linen, she added: “I hear the lions, but there is nothing on me that they would eat. I have no flesh on me for them to scent.” At this moment the wagon drew near, which greatly alarmed her, for she supposed that it was an animal. Assuring her that it would do her no harm, I said that as I could not stay I would put her into the wagon and take her with me. At this remark she became convulsed with terror. Others addressed her, but all to no effect. She replied that if we took her and left her at another village, they would only do the same

thing again. "It is our custom; I am nearly dead, I do not want to die again."

"The sun was now piercingly hot; the oxen were raging in the yoke, and we ourselves nearly delirious. Finding it impossible to influence the woman to move without running the risk of her dying convulsed in our hands, we collected a quantity of fuel, gave her a good supply of dry meat, some tobacco, and a knife, with some other articles, telling her we should return in two days and stop the night, when she would be able to go with us, only she must keep up a good fire at night, as the lions would smell the dried flesh, if they did not scent her. We then pursued our course, and, after a long ride, passing a rocky ridge of hills, we came to a stagnant pool, into which men and oxen rushed precipitately, though the water was almost too muddy to go down our throats.

"On our return to the spot according to promise, we found the old woman and every thing gone; but, on examination discovered the footmarks of two men, from the hills referred to, who appeared to have taken her away. Several months afterwards I learned from an individual who visited the station, that the sons, seeing from a distance the wagon halt at the spot where they had so unnaturally left their mother to perish, came to see, supposing that the travellers had been viewing the mangled remains of their mother. Finding her alive and supplied with food, and on her telling the story of the strangers' kindness, they were

alarmed, and dreading the vengeance of the great chief, whom they supposed me to be, took her home and were providing for her with more than usual care."

"What a blessed thing that he happened there just then!" exclaimed Miss Westlake. "And I have murmured about my life. I am a happy old woman, after all!"

Electa did not speak her thoughts. That dreadful thing happened out in God's world. But He had thought about the poor mother who had not taught her little children about Morimo, and moved towards her the feet of the missionary. She would tell Trude about this. Trude's day-dream was to go to Africa.

"Don't begin in the middle, child; turn back to the beginning, I want to hear it all; it sounds like him telling it when you read."

Electa's fingers were on her pen; Mr. Ryle had promised to send a line to her father announcing her safe arrival, but she wanted to open her heart to Celia; she felt as if she could not sleep until she had written to Celia.

"Begin at the very beginning, child," Miss Westlake said again.

With no movement of impatience she turned the leaves and began at the very beginning. She saw the words and pronounced them correctly; she tried to read in a wide-awake voice, but sudden homesickness so overwhelmed her that she knew not what she was reading. Page after page she read,

her voice changing at last into a weary monotone; the clock struck eight, and Miss Westlake, with her head upon one side, was fast asleep. The watchers had not come, and, drearier still, Mr. Ryle had not come. If she could but hear his voice or behold his face one moment! Her heart would burst if somebody did not come; she dropped her head upon the table moaning: "Oh, mamma! oh, Celia! oh, papa, papa!"

God's world was a very empty place to her to-night; the places and things in it seemed very far apart, and the spaces between so wide, so empty. It was a long, rainy way to Mr. Ryle and his beautiful mother, and a longer, longer way to The Bee hive, with nothing but emptiness between it and her. Cousin Patty was asleep,—no, Cousin Patty was awake, and Cousin Jane was asleep, and she was all alone. She moved the table and her chair nearer Miss Westlake's chair, so near that she might touch her hand, and sat down to write to Celia. She had left home, partly that Celia might not leave home; must she not therefore write her a cheery letter?

Like papa, her sunny side was sunshine itself. This letter was so sweet and sunny that even papa was puzzled and wondered at the brightness of the child. He would not have wondered had he seen her head drop upon the table and heard the supplication of her heart before she wrote "Dear everybody at home." It was a letter wholly outside of herself. She laughed about not kindling the

fire and the broken pitcher, and told them how she had lost her way upstairs in the dark and stayed years before Cousin Jane called. Celia said that her story of Patty's life and death was a little poem, She was sure that Electa would do the wonderful thing in the family.

The letter was written and nine o'clock had struck, three pages in her journal were written. Pollok read awhile, and ten o'clock had struck. Cousin Jane opened her eyes and looked around sleepily.

"What, nobody come yet! Was that ten? I know now what I did! I got confused and mixed things up, and that's why nobody has come. I told Mr. Truman that Mr. Lewis and his wife were coming, and I told Mrs. Lewis,—I'm sure I don't know what I did tell her; and I sent word by the undertaker that—well, I hardly know what I did say. Lecty, we'll have to stay alone. I have their supper all ready, too. We'll go in and see if she's all right and comfortable, and then go to bed, shall we? Your eyes are round and wide open!"

"Well," assented Electa, "but I wish somebody had come."

"I don't care, I like to be alone with you; I feel as if you made the house full."

As they went out into the hall their footsteps sounded very loud to Electa. Miss Westlake held the light, fearing that Electa might drop it and set the house on fire, while Electa unlocked the door. Unchanged and still was the little, old face.

"I'm glad she had as good times as she had," Miss Westlake said; "think of that poor old woman, among the lions, starving to death. Patty hadn't any trouble but the trouble she made for herself."

The candle flickered as they went out into the hall; was any house ever so large and quiet before? Electa slept and dreamed of home, Miss Westlake slept and dreamed that she and Patty were little girls going to school together and telling each other what they would do when they were grown up; Mr. Ryle remembered Electa, but he had been called three miles from home to see a dying man as he had turned his horse's head toward Walnut Grove; he thought of her as he fell asleep, and planned to visit her on Monday; his mother felt again the touch of Electa's hand and lips and her soft, long hair; she prayed for David before she slept and for David's wife. And David's wife, not knowing that she was David's wife and that somebody's faith and prayers were bringing her a blessing, being restless and unable to sleep, comforted herself with repeating the hymn beginning with such a world of comfort:

"Father, I know that all my life
Is portioned out for me."



X.

ADOPTED.

Another day of heavy, hard rain. Electa felt as if it had rained forever and would go on raining forever.

"Patty used to like to hear it rain," said Cousin Jane.

Electa mused as she dressed, and mused as she ate her breakfast. "I wish that I might do one little, last thing for her," she was thinking.

But the one little thing she could not think of; neighbors whom Patty had not seen for years had dressed her in a white robe and laid her in her casket, they had smoothed her hair and laid together her busy hands; there was nothing left for the little girl that came in the storm to do.

"Did she like flowers?" she questioned, suddenly breaking her boiled egg carefully.

There was but one "she" in the world to Patty's sister. "Flowers! No, she didn't seem to care much for them; only that southernwood; I took a piece of that and laid it on her pillow the day she died."

"I wish I could find some autumn leaves and make a cross. Will people bring flowers?"

"What for?"

"I might put some southernwood in her hand; may I?"

"Why, yes, child, if you want to. Your egg is all getting cold, and you haven't eaten a mouthful of toast."

"I'm not hungry. I'll go in now," decided Electa rising.

"I suppose people won't come to-day; only the minister to make a prayer with us; it will be a queer funeral without one mourner."

"Do go; I'll go with you," coaxed Electa.

"Oh, I can't; I couldn't. How could I go among so many people? I'm all dropping to pieces now; I feel as if I wanted something or somebody to hold me together."

"It seems too bad to let strangers bury her," said Electa.

"Does it? I'll tell her all about it when I see her, and she'll understand; that is, if I don't forget. I do forget so; when I woke up this morning I thought that you were Cynthia Stairs that used to go to singing-school with me. Things are very crooked and mixed up to me. I think I'll get Mr. Ryle to make my will before I forget what I want to do."

Electa went into the kitchen and picked three sprigs of southernwood; it seemed an easy thing to do until she looked down at the cold, stiff fingers that she must touch. She had not remembered that she must touch her hands. She had never felt

the touch of a dead hand. The sprigs fell to the carpet, she could not do it, after all; Cousin Jane did not care, it could not make any difference to any body. She might think of something else that she could do.

"Lecty!" Miss Westlake had come to the doorway. "I just thought why she doesn't look natural to me; they have plastered her hair down smooth on both sides and she always wore it pushed back. Just get her comb and brush and brush it back, and let me see how it looks. I wondered what was the matter with her, now I know."

"Oh, I don't want to; I don't want to," Electa cried within herself. "I can't do it."

"I would do it myself, but I want to remember her soft and warm."

The quavering voice broke down; Electa spoke quickly: "I'll do it; where are the comb and brush?"

"On the bureau in her room."

Miss Westlake went out to pick up the kindlings for Electa to build a fire in the room across the hall; "Mother's room," she called it. Electa stood with the southernwood in her hand looking down at the face and hands that she dreaded unutterably to touch. She did not like to touch any one unless she loved them; never of her own accord would she shake hands with a stranger. She had wanted to do some little thing, and now this hard thing was given her to do. If the desire to do come from God, must not the opportunity and

the thing to do come from Him, also? Electa did not put this thought into words; after one wavering instant she went upstairs for brush and comb.

Lifting the hair with her fingers to loosen it, she brushed it back; with the first shrinking touch her dread was taken away; after that it was not hard to place the fragrant green sprigs in the hands, even to move the fingers so that they might clasp it.

"Oh, how nice and pretty!" exclaimed Miss Westlake, coming to the threshold with an armful of wood and kindlings. "Now I'm happy and comfortable." She tottered across the hall murmuring: "Nobody needs me now."

The day did not seem like Sunday to Electa, it was like yesterday. "I can't go to church," she said to herself as she opened the stove door to kindle the fire. "I can't see any body at home or Mr. Ryle or his mother or John Gray, and I can't have a letter! Oh, dear! And it rains and the house is so still, and to-night it will be stiller."

The fire went out; but at the second attempt she succeeded; she brought one chair nearer the fire, placed another nearer the window, re-arranged the books on the table, and then her morning's work was done. The long day would be more endless than yesterday. Sunday was their best day at home, because mamma could give all her time to them and Celia's busy-ness was laid aside until to-morrow.

Miss Westlake opened the door and looked in;

the muscles of her face were drawn as if in physical pain, and when she spoke Electa noticed that her voice had lost its self-control. "I've taken my last look at Patty; don't let people look at me and talk to me," she pleaded, staggering into the room.

Electa sprang forward and led her to her mother's chair, brought her a footstool, and gently pressed her head against the cushioned back of the chair, then seating herself on the carpet between the chair and the window, she began to sing softly. The rain beat against the panes, the fire cracked, Electa sang on and on.

Among the books on the table she had noticed one with the title: "Solitude Sweetened." There might be something in it for Cousin Jane; there might be something in it for herself. Eagerly she opened it; it was a book of meditations. She glanced through it. "Providence, Disappointments, Experience, Resignation, Death, On a Blind Beggar, After Sickiness, Going to a Fair, A Journey along the Seashore, Prayer, Contradictions, On the Author's first Using Glasses, On Casting our Care on God, A Glance at the Glories on the other Side Creation."

These were but a part of the themes. Cousin Jane would like the last one. They were written long ago; she would like them because they were old.

The old lady was leaning back in her chair, the slow tears rolling unheeded down her cheeks. Stationing herself on the carpet under the window, Electa opened the book at random and read aloud.

The companionship in the tone was all that the listener felt; the words and thoughts she could not grasp. One thought Electa found for herself: "The Father hath loved the Son and given all things into His hand; the Son hath loved us and given us all things richly to enjoy." She was not enjoying the "all things" to-day.

Page after page she read in her musical, sympathetic voice; the reddened, quivering eyelids became still, the tears dried upon the cheeks, a smile touched her lips as Cousin Jane slept.

Electa leaned back against the wall sighing for something to do; there was nothing to do but think, and she was tired of thinking; outside of herself was this room and Cousin Jane and the winding, muddy road and the houses dark through the rain. There were strangers in all the houses; if she should follow the road for miles and miles she would meet more strangers. Far down the road—she had lifted her head to look out—a wagon with a black top, drawn by two horses, was approaching, and not far off, a church bell was sounding. At home they were on the way to church; Vail would miss her in church, and perhaps papa would when he looked down at the parsonage pew. There were so many to be missed now beside herself—Martyn and Arch and Trude and Robin. Were any of them as desolate as she was? But no one needed her as Cousin Jane needed her; if Cousin Jane should awake and find her gone, she would call her and no one else. In all the world there

was no one so near to Cousin Jane as she was. A low tap was at the door, the door-knob turned; Electa sprang to her feet; before she could speak John Gray had opened the door.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she exclaimed joyously.

"I came to see if I could be of use," he whispered coming towards her. He was dressed in a suit of coarse gray, his shirt was of unbleached muslin, and his boots the heaviest that she had ever seen.

He intercepted her glance at his boots. "I know I don't dress well," he said, coloring painfully; "but I have so little money, and I must have a book now and then."

"Why I didn't—what did I do?" she asked smiling.

"You thought that I do not look like your brothers."

"No, you don't; my brothers are not at all handsome," she said unconsciously, thinking of them and not of him.

"I would have come last night, but it was dark and late when I got home from Swanzey; if Mr. Morris had not forgotten his basket of groceries I shouldn't have gone to Swanzey at all, and if I had not caught my toe and tripped exactly in front of—but that's telling; what would you like to have more than any thing?"

"Something to read; no, I know! oh, you haven't brought me a letter!"

"Something very like it," he said his face as beaming as her own, as he unbuttoned his jacket

and drew from his vest pocket a large business like envelope.

"From Arch! Oh, the dear boy! And he wrote to Swanzey instead of Walnut Grove! And he meant it to meet me; I might have had it Friday, perhaps; I do thank you so very much."

John Gray could not help saying: "I thank you, too," then wondered what he meant. He told Mr. Ryle afterward that Electa Given's attractiveness consisted in her "unexpectedness."

"Is there any thing that I can do for Miss Jane?"

"I don't know; I don't like to awaken her to ask," she answered, opening her envelope.

"Don't do that; I'm in no hurry."

"Will you sit down and read?"

"I'll find something to do," he said gravely, a gleam of fun brightening his eyes.

Electa went back to the carpet between Miss Westlake's chair and the window to read her letter hastily, then to read it slowly. It was just like Arch to think of her.

John Gray went out into the hall and stood there looking around; he was seeking a good place to hide something. On the hall table, under the sheet of yellow wrapping paper, half hidden and half revealed, he placed another envelope; then taking another from his breast pocket he went lightly upstairs; Electa's door stood open, it would be just what she needed at bedtime after the long day. This writing was daintily pretty and the post-

mark Washington; but she would think it intrusive for him to enter; the letter was not a trunk, he had no excuse for taking this upstairs; so with a disappointed air he turned and came down. If he had a sister or a mother she should have a cosy chamber like that. What would Electa think of his carpetless floor, bare walls, and hard bed! But his trunk had books in it; she would appreciate them.

The third letter must have another hiding-place; how could he manage for her to have it at night under her pillow? He might keep it until Miss Jane awoke. And the fourth! How he would love to see her face each time. This was a thick letter, and the penmanship was like a school girl's. She had so many to write to her and he had not one. Returning the Washington letter to his pocket, he found a place for the school girl's letter, in the closet in the kitchen, in a large platter. She would surely go to that closet at dinner-time.

"Cousin Jane is awake!"

He started guiltily, confused and stammering he tried to speak. Electa was silent and indignant. John Gray was certainly not a gentleman. She almost said, "Are you looking for something to eat?" She had intended to read Arch's letter to him, but she was too disappointed in him; she could never honor him again. She remained in the kitchen while he went into "mother's room" to speak to Miss Westlake; she was not in the kitchen when he passed through to go out. He lingered, hoping that she would return to speak to

him, then laughed as he ran down the steps into the shed, for how indignant she would be at herself for misjudging him!

John Gray never made a shadow in his life by putting himself between himself and the light. With his single eye he could see clearly. He never did any thing that he was ashamed of, therefore how could he, for longer than one moment, feel ashamed? He had trained himself to look outside of himself. Had Electa found herself likely to be misjudged she would not have eaten or slept till all was explained; but he tossed his annoyance away with a laugh; there was nothing morbid in his heart or mind. He could become as a breezy west wind to Electa, if she would not be too morbidly sensitive to bear his influence. After he went away she came down-stairs, pale and quiet; she had made a hero of John Gray, and to find her hero poking around in a stranger's kitchen closet was not at all ludicrous, it was humiliating.

But what was that? A letter under that wrapping paper! Another letter? How silly she was! She would not even look. She could not keep her eyes from peeping however. It *was* a letter, and from Martyn! It was just like Martyn to think of her. She could almost forgive John Gray, for the sake of this surprise.

Sitting on the stairs, her eyes filled with happy tears as she read the letter. Martyn would have made a vow to write a letter for every Sunday could he have seen her face! For fully three min-

utes she forgot the gloom outside and the gloom inside. What a different day this would have been had not Mr. Morris forgotten his basket of groceries, and had not John Gray stumbled in front of the post-office! What a different day this would have been had not the boys forgotten that they were to write to Walnut Grove and had they neglected to write to Swanzey instead? Were these the things that papa called providences? Providences, she thought, were to teach the great events in people's lives, to change the fate of a nation or to save the life of a king; she hardly dared call the slight happenings that brought her letters to her by such an awe-inspiring name. Still,—balancing the letter on her hand as she reasoned,—how could she thank God for them if He had not done it, and she did want to thank Him; not Arch, or Martyn; only God, could know how much they were to her. The letters were of one sheet of mercantile note each; not girls' newsy, chatty letters, but brief, rather business-like, good, and kind, and brotherly, and so much like home. Now if she could have a letter from one of the girls, from Trude, or Robin, she would be satisfied—almost. They were away from home having a good time; if they would only think of her!

The letters were reread and looked at and laid away, and book after book opened, glanced through, and thrown down. There did not seem to be a *young* book in the house.

"Boston's fourfold State." The title was not at-

tractive, but she read the title page carefully: "Human Nature in its Fourfold State; of Primitive Integrity, Entire Depravity, Begun Recovery, and Consummate Happiness or Misery; Subsisting in the Parents of Mankind in Paradise, the Unregenerate, the Regenerate, and all Mankind in the Future State." She turned the pages and read sentences, now and then a paragraph; it was too hard for her, too grown up, she could not understand it. The next book that she opened,—these were in the secretary in her own chamber,—was a leather-bound, stained and spotted cover of a volume of "Plutarch's Lives," translated from the original Greek, with notes critical and historical. It was in eight volumes; this was volume third. She opened to Antony and became absorbed; ancient history had always been among her favorite studies; suddenly the book dropped from her hand: was this Sunday reading? Was it right to be laughing over an anecdote of Antony and Cleopatra and to remember that she must write to Arch that Cleopatra had made fun of Antony by ordering one of her divers to put a salt fish upon his hook while he was fishing? Replacing it she opened another, bound in leather, stained and pencil marked. "Paley's Moral and Political Philosophy." Ah, she might read that, for her eyes caught the words: "Duty and efficacy of prayer as seen by the light of nature."

The subject of prayer was of intense interest to her; she lost herself in the book and was aroused

only by a change of subject. "Subjection to Civil Government," she certainly did not care to read. "Religious Experience." That might be something interesting and good, there might be something of a story about it; she exclaimed with delight at lighting upon the words: "Considerations on dreams, visions, and so forth." This book she could enjoy; with a brightened face she took it down-stairs to her seat on the carpet between Miss Westlake's chair and the window and read for an hour. It was not a story book, but there were incidents and illustrations that interested her, that comforted and helped, that answered some of the questions she had been too shy to ask.

The long morning passed and no one came. The black top wagon passed on its way home from church, and again she watched it as long as she could see it. She brought in wood for the fires and swept the ashes back from the hearth of the Franklin. Miss Westlake dozed, seldom stirring, she appeared to sleep restfully, and Electa, although longing to speak to her, to hear the sound of her voice, did not by sound or touch awaken her.

"I want somebody to speak to me," she almost sobbed, as the wind rattled the window frames and caused the shutters upstairs to bang and slam against the house. "Cousin Jane," she whispered, rising and touching her hand; "Cousin Jane," she said aloud, "shall I get dinner now?" Suppose that Cousin Jane should not move or speak? Suppose that she had stopped breathing? She laughed

when the old lady stirred, opened her eyes, and looked up at her; she would have kissed her for very joy had she not been so shy.

"I don't want any dinner; get some for yourself; there's cold beef and apple pie and currant jelly and biscuits. Are you hungry?"

"Yes'm, I am; won't you eat with me? I don't like to eat alone, I never ate alone in my life."

"I couldn't swallow a mouthful, child; eat your own dinner and don't trouble me."

Electa turned away; the voice was childish and fretful, her cheeks were burning and her hands hot.

"I will go upstairs and lie down in my own bed where I used to sleep with Patty; what time is it?"

"About one o'clock."

"I'll stay till it's all over; don't let any body look at me or speak to me; I want to go to sleep."

"But the minister will come," expostulated Electa.

"No matter for the minister; do as I tell you. I want to be alone; don't call me, whatever happens."

"There's nothing to happen," said Electa; "I wish something would."

"Give Lily some hay, and pump her trough full of water, can I trust you to do that?" asked Miss Westlake, rising with difficulty.

"Try me and see."

"There's no hay down; you will have to go up the ladder into the mow and throw it down; be careful and not fall, and don't hurt yourself with the fork. Did you ever do such a thing?"

"No; but if you can do it, I ought to be able to."

"Well, child, don't hurt yourself, and eat a good dinner," she said, putting out her hands as if she could not see the way. "I am glad it storms, for it keeps people from rushing here."

For the first time in her life Electa wished that people would come. She would never again wish for solitude.

"Lean on me, Cousin Jane."

"I might as well lean on a wisp of straw," she answered tenderly.

Electa took her hand and led her through the hall and upstairs through the chamber they had shared together into Patty's room. Patty's bed was soft and warm, the sheets and blankets were sweet with the perfume of the damask rose. Electa untied her shoes and slipped them off, unbuttoned her dress, and arranged the pillows as she dictated, wrapping her in a blanket and tucking her in as if she were a little child.

"Thank you," she said; "I need you, but nobody needs me now; it's all over, and I can go to sleep. Patty won't get out, and nothing will happen to her, and nobody will know. Feed Lily and get yourself a good dinner, and let me go to sleep."

"May I bring you a cup of tea?"

"No, nothing; I don't want any thing," she said decidedly.

Electa looked around the room; every thing was in perfect order. There was nothing that she could do. She might not even sit and watch her

as she slept, she might not fan her or bathe her head; there was not a thread to be picked from the carpet, there was not a speck of dust anywhere. All she might do was to step softly out, leaving the door ajar that she might hear if Cousin Jane should call.

There was no one down-stairs to do any thing for; no one that needed her nearer than a hundred miles; the house seemed to grow more silent and empty every hour. Oh, the full, full house at home. Oh, the happy noises, the footsteps, the voices, the low laughter, the moving in and out, the opening and shutting doors, the gentle Sunday bustle. If she might only hear a sound, any sound save the occasional bang of a shutter, or the ticking of the clock, or the snapping of the fire; any sound beside the ceaseless rain and the wind. Her own light footsteps startled her; as she closed the sitting-room door, she shivered at the sound; should she close it, thus shutting herself in and shutting Cousin Jane out? She felt that she should choke if she attempted to eat.

But Lily must eat if she could not; throwing her shawl about her, and leaving each door open behind her as if for protection, she hardly knew from what, she hurried out through the shed to the brick walk, glad of the rain that fell upon her uncovered head, glad of her firm foothold upon the bricks. She had felt as if every thing were slipping away under her feet.

Beautiful, white Lily stood waiting for her

or for somebody, in meditative content. Electa patted her and asked her if she liked to be out there alone, and passed through into the barn floor. She dreaded the ascent of the ladder, she dreaded stepping into the mow. Trude and Robin would have thought it fun, but she had never romped in the barn as they had done. But somebody had anticipated her, the hay was already thrown down; not enough for to-day, but enough for a week.

"Somebody is very good," she said aloud, for the sake of hearing her own voice. Gathering the hay upon the fork she lifted it above her head and carried it into Lily's stable, tossing it down before her.

"Are you ready for your dinner?" she asked. "Don't you care if you must eat alone? Doesn't your heart ever ache? Don't you know what to cry for?"

Returning several times she spread an abundance of hay around Lily; fresh straw had been laid for her bed, and the trough was filled with water. After looking around to see that Lily was comfortable she went into the barn floor and sat down upon a pile of hay. The rain fell heavily upon the roof; through the two small windows she could see the evergreens bending before the storm. She wondered if she might bring her dinner and eat it sitting upon the hay; with Lily so near, and a book and the hay that reminded her of home; she would not be so desolate as in the empty house,

with the still presence down-stairs and the sleeping presence upstairs. But the minister must come soon and the people—and the minister might be like papa. Oh, if it only might be Mr. Ryle? Rising very slowly she again wrapped herself in her shawl and went into the house.

"I can't eat," she said, standing before the kitchen stove; "but it would be something to do." It would be too lonely to set the table and sit down and make believe that it was dinner-time; she decided to take a piece of pie in her hand and eat as she read. She opened the door into the hall and listened: not a sound, not a new sound; Cousin Jane must be asleep.

The pie was in the kitchen closet; she had cut a piece and taken it into her hand when she felt moved to turn back, not with any design, simply from impulse, and there in the platter was laid Trude's letter!

With a cry she burst into tears. It was almost too good to be true. And Trude had been thinking of her, too. Forgetting the pie, she dropped it into the platter and opened the letter. It was a foolscap sheet. Chatty and newsy, full of frolic, and study, good resolutions, plans for the future, and gratitude to all at home; full of sympathy for her, suggestions as to how she should pass her time and calling her a darling, self-denying, little sister.

"She doesn't know that it's for her," thought Electa, smiling through happy tears.

After that, how could she but eat a good dinner? At the appointed time the minister came; a grave young man, who shook hands kindly with her and prayed with her, promising to call upon Miss Westlake through the week. Men came and carried the casket, enclosed in a pine box, down the piazza steps, down the long path to the gate, and pushed it into the hearse. Electa stood on the piazza till they started, the minister in his buggy, the hearse with its plumes following; through the mud and the dismal rain they passed on out of her sight. Patty was gone; she and Jane were all alone now. She locked and bolted the door, locking the door of the room where Patty had lain, and then went into "mother's room" to see if the fire were burning. It was almost out, one stick of wood remained in the wood box; she put it on the fire, and then went to the windows to look up the road and down the road. Somebody was coming; was it a man or a boy? It could not be John Gray. Oh if it only were! She would not look again and he disappointed, she would go upstairs and tell Cousin Jane about the minister.

"I heard them," said Miss Westlake, rising and tossing the blankets aside.

"Now will you come down?" cried Electa, joyfully; "and, oh, I found another letter! I'll read it to you, and make you a cup of tea, and we'll be as comfortable as we know how to be."

With gentle persuasion she coaxed Miss Westlake into the rocker before the Franklin, and

busied herself in setting the table and making tea.

As Electa was stooping over the stove pouring the hot water into the brown teapot, there was a step in the shed.

"May I come again?" asked John Gray, his head appearing at the kitchen door; "may I come all the time?"

"Oh, I thank you! I do thank you!" exclaimed Electa, so startled that she sprinkled hot water over her hand.

"Mrs. Morris sent me to stay all night," he said, coming in.

"We don't need you," Miss Westlake called out; "but come in and stay."

"We *do* need you," said Electa in a low tone.

"Of course you need me, Miss Jane," he said; "don't you want a grandson? I'm in pressing need of a grandmother." He went to her and stood at her side; Electa entered with the teapot in her hand.

"My children," the quavering voice broke down, ending with a sob; "my children, I'll take you both, if you will only stay with a lonesome old woman like me."

"All right, grandma," John Gray bent over and kissed her forehead. "Now I belong to you and you to me; I never belonged to any one before. Come, Cousin Electa, and kiss your grandmother."

Electa came shyly and kissed her.

"Now we are adopted all round," cried John

Gray, gayly; "and if I'm not good to you, grandma, may nobody ever be good to me."

Like a flash of light came the thought to Miss Westlake: "Now I know what the Lord wants my money for; I'll adopt John Gray and educate him."

But she answered as quietly as if there were not a tumult of joy within her: "Then you must eat something with me, and read to me by and by; and to-morrow we'll make our plans. You must come and live with me, of course."

Electa almost shouted. Was it possible that she would never be so lonely and homesick again? Was her hard time over so soon?

"I knew something was ready to happen," said John Gray; "my inheritance hasn't failed yet."

"What *is* your inheritance?" questioned Electa wonderingly.

"God's providence is mine inheritance," he quoted reverently.



XI.

THE DOOR AJAR.

Miss Westlake held an open book in her hand, but she could not fix her eyes upon its pages; despite the thought that it was Sunday and the day of Patty's funeral she could not lose herself in her usual Sunday reading. The small, leather-bound, stained volume dropped again and again from her fingers as her eyes wandered to the table where they were sitting,—her children, her two children, who were being given to her after her long years of "expecting things."

The dark face and the fair face both so alive, so young, so eager! The old blood in her veins throbbed and leaped. God was setting the solitary in a family; like Hannah her countenance would be no more sad.

With an effort she brought her eyes back to her book: "The Christian's Great Interest; in Two Parts. I. The Trial of a saving Interest in Christ. II. The Way how to Attain it." On the coarse fly-leaf in a bold hand was written: "Catherine Westlake, her book, 1797."

A pile of old books had been placed on the table

between the children; once in a while each read a separate book, but oftener the two heads were bent together over the same musty volume.

"You ask me the questions, and see how many I can answer," John was saying.

But, no, she must not listen, she must not allow her thoughts to wander; for fifty years she had read a sermon on Sunday evening. She fastened her eyes upon the book and read: "The believer may also be hourly with God, to go in daily with his failings, and seek repentance and pardon and peace through Christ's advocateship."

The book dropped again; the old wrists had suddenly grown weak, the old eyes were refusing to read. The children were talking in subdued voices.

"Study without prayer is atheism," John read. "I believe that."

"So do I," assented Electa warmly. "What are you going to be?"

"A student all my life. I wish I dared show you something."

"Don't you? Why don't you?"

"Because I'm ashamed; nobody knows. If you keep on being so kind, I believe I will. I'm faint-hearted now, through lack of encouragement; but perhaps you may not encourage me."

"I will if it's worth it," she promised.

"There's the rub. I don't believe it is. Genius is bold, they say; I'm not bold, therefore I can't be a genius."

"John Gray," Miss Westlake opened her eyes

and turned towards him, "what do you want most to do?"

"Study," he replied promptly, "and travel, and then settle down to hard work."

"Study what?"

"Books, and things, and men!"

"Travel where?"

"Over our own grand, big country, from north to south, from east to west."

"What kind of hard work do you want to do?"

"Something to help men to know themselves and to know God."

"What is that something?"

"I haven't decided yet."

"Preaching, isn't it?"

"Teaching in some shape; I think," speaking slowly, "that I shall choose to teach."

"I like that," cried Electa in a tone of great satisfaction; "don't teach until you can do something better, but let the teaching be the something better. Teach boys all your life."

"And influence boys to love Christ as Arnold of Rugby did. I will, Electa."

The tone awed Electa, she could not reply; with a little gush of gladness, her face brightened, then became grave.

John Gray had chosen his life-work, why might not she?

Miss Westlake smiled contentedly, and closed her eyes again. Electa snuffed the candle with the brass snuffers, set them in the brass tray, and

ran her finger up and down the tall, smooth candle. John Gray had chosen, why could not she? With a long breath, freighted with many thoughts, she opened "The Improvement of the Mind, by Isaac Watts, D.D.," and began to read "Rules Relating to Observation."

"Among all these observations write down what is most remarkable and uncommon," she read.

"Lecty," the soft, wistful voice arrested her. "Lecty, what would you like to do?"

"Oh, I know," closing the book, "I think I know. I'd like to open all this house and let sunshine in, and after the sunshine was in, I'd bring in flowers and music and little children that hadn't had any sunshine and flowers and music, and I'd love them and teach them what John will teach his boys. I'd wash them and dress them and sing to them and tell them stories and have Vail and Celia to help me."

"And what would you do with me, pray?"

"Oh, you should be our lovely grandmother, and rock the babies to sleep."

"I'm too old to bear the noise, child."

"There would be a noise, I suppose; laughing and singing and talking and moving around; I couldn't keep them in bed all the time. This house should be as happy as The Beehive."

"But it would cost a great deal."

"Yes, I suppose it would cost something, but I'd keep cows, and raise my own fruit and vegetables, and the dress wouldn't cost much, would it?"

"Your children would have to grow up."

"And go out in the world to do hard, good work; then I'd get more little ones, and they should all learn beautiful things, and somebody would need every one of them; they should all be willing to do any thing, if only they might help somebody. I'd have the motto of my house, 'Ourselves, your servants, for Jesus' sake.'"

"I'll take that for mine," said John Gray; "I never thought of it before."

"I wish our air-castles couldn't tumble down," said Electa. "I want mine to be real."

"Yours shall be if I can make it so," said Miss Westlake to herself, "after I'm gone,—I couldn't stand the noise—I'm dropping to pieces now."

"I've had such a good day, after all," said Electa brightly, "thanks to your tripping in front of the post-office and Mr. Morris forgetting his tea, coffee, and sugar."

"So good that you don't want another letter?" asked John, smiling, "you wouldn't take another, if I should offer it to you."

"I'll go and look in all the nooks and corners," she answered laughing.

"You've forgiven me now for looking in other people's closets?"

Electa laughed and colored uneasily. Miss Westlake's hand was finding its way to her pocket. "Oh, you haven't another! You can't have another!" cried Electa, observing the motion and

springing to her feet. "You wouldn't tease me; I do want it so."

"Yes, here's the last," said Miss Westlake as Electa caught her hand with its white treasure.

"Oh, Cousin Jane!"

"You mean grandma," corrected John.

"Grandma," said Electa.

"Positively the last," said John.

"And it's from Robin, darling old Robin! Oh, how good she is to think of me!"

"Four in one day! How many would be too many?" questioned Miss Westlake.

"I shall never know," said Electa. "I never had four in one mail before."

Robin's letter contained a lively description of her life in Washington: the places she visited, the people she met, the books she read. How far away Robin's world seemed to Electa sitting at the little table among books that belonged to the past, with the old-fashioned fire and tall candles, the sweet old lady and roughly dressed youth her only companions. Robin's world seemed full of dazzling lights and confusing noises, the voices of strangers and the rustle and bustle of coming and going.

"I'm so sorry for you, poor, forlorn child," she added in closing. "Do my wonderful good times harm your soul? There are so many *good* people out in the world; I used to think that to be out in the world one had to be *worldly*, but I see that it isn't a needs-be, at all. After the din of the tumult became a thing of course, and the inner

tumult subsided, I found that I was the same Robin that I am at home, and my own room is as hushed and quiet as my room at The Beehive. Two of the colored waiters seemed to feel drawn to Cousin Horace and opened their hearts to him, and listened so eagerly while he talked to them. 'There wasn't room for Jesus in an inn once,' Cousin Horace said. 'Do you find room for Him now?' I don't forget that, it helps me every day. And a young clerk, while standing in a vestibule with us to hail a car, said something that led to a conversation with Cousin Horace. He said that he had united with the Church, but had never gone to Communion, he felt too wicked. I think that he will go now, he can't help it. And just now while sitting here writing in the cheeriest, handsomest parlor, I have been half listening to the conversation of two girls about as old as Nan and I. One of them is dressed in black velvet, her only ornament a diamond cross; her bright stockings and pretty slippers look so pretty as she raises her feet to rest them upon the fender. We have a coal fire in a grate, and it seems to draw us together. The other girl is so little and sweet and womanly that I long to speak to her.

"The girl in velvet asked, 'What is your idea of heaven?'

"I looked up to listen and both smiled. Then they talked about prayer and 'H. H.' and Charles Kingsley and 'Tom Brown' Hughes and George Macdonald.

"The velvet girl jumped up and said, 'I wish my papa would come,' and I thought how glad and proud her papa must be. She is as pretty and sweet as Nan, and she has been out in the world while Nan has been in a country home. I think that she has let Jesus come into the inn. Suppose that I had gone to Cousin Jane's and you had come with Cousin Jennie; I wonder if our lives would have been any different. We both chose, you know; if I had chosen Cousin Jane's, you might have been chosen by Cousin Jennie. I am so glad of my choosing; I am getting brisk and wide-awake and ready for the next thing. I am glad that I can get ready without waiting to know what it is. Here comes a lady with diamond earrings, a diamond bar, and four diamond rings. I used to want a diamond ring, but now I don't: I see too many.

"I hope that you will be glad of your choosing some day; but it must be hopeless and forlorn enough now. I'm not a bit homesick. I enjoy my pretty things and every body and every thing, and Cousin Jennie and Cousin Horace seem so glad to have me with them, so I know I help to make their good time. I'll write often; good-by, poor dear."

Forlorn! Yes, it was rather forlorn, she acknowledged to herself as she refolded the sheet; forlorn, but not hopeless. Robin hoped for something new and delightful with every new to-morrow; and her to-morrow, what was she hoping for or looking forward to? Cousin Jane might give

her Patty's jewels and she would choose how to give them away, and Mr. Ryle would certainly call, and she would have a letter from Celia! What else? Household work! It would be Monday. Monday was wash-day; would Cousin Jane expect her to *wash*? She had never washed or ironed any thing beside handkerchiefs and collars in her life; she could not do it, she would be too tired. But she could not refuse; oh, dear, she had not thought of that. Would Cousin Jane call this a visit and let her go home? She was not strong enough to wash and iron even to earn a hundred dollars for Trude. This plan was seeming to be a failure; she must think of something else that she could do.

Forlorn for Electa, but not for the loving, intent eyes that were watching her; the drooping eyelids the grieved lips were telling Miss Westlake a story. It *was* hard for the child to come to her; she was giving up every thing for the little in this lonely, old house. To-night it was a lonely house to Patty's sister.

"Can't you read your letters to me?" Miss Westlake asked wistfully; "I like to know about things away off."

"Trude's and Robin's! Would you like to hear both? It will seem as if they were talking to us."

Electa read aloud both letters, skipping now and then a sentence or a paragraph.

"Please read them again, and don't skip," pleaded Miss Westlake.

"Do you want to hear how they pity me for being homesick?" laughed Electa.

"Yes, every word."

Miss Westlake was beginning to understand the home and the companionship that Electa had left; she was beginning to understand what it was for her to be shut up with herself.

"She shall have enough to make up," she repeated to herself. Awaking in the night she said again and again half aloud, "She shall have enough to make up."

It seemed very queer to John Gray to sleep in the chamber that he had admired that morning; his inheritance was bringing him some very pleasant things.

All Monday morning Electa moved about the house, up stairs and down, with her letters in her pocket, little guessing of the effect they had had upon Cousin Jane.

"The child shall have enough to make up," Miss Westlake said to herself many times that morning, as she watched the busy, brown figure flitting from one thing to another at her bidding and oftentimes divining her unspoken wish. It was a continual wonder to the old lady that the child knew about so many things without being told. It was so long since she had been associated with girls that she thought of Electa as seven instead of seventeen; in her estimation there may not have been very much difference between the two ages.

"I didn't feel like washing this morning," said

Miss Westlake, as she arose from the dinner-table.

"Do you wash? Do you expect me to wash?" exclaimed Electa.

"Certainly I wash. I am not too old to be past labor."

"Can't you hire somebody?"

"I don't know."

"John Gray will send somebody; won't you let him, please? I don't know how."

"I don't suppose that I can do his washing and yours, too. He will make work, I hadn't thought of that. I don't want a stranger in the house."

"Send the washing and ironing out!" suggested Electa. "John will find somebody."

"That is a good idea," replied Miss Westlake, thoughtfully; "I can't have any more people around. I feel so confused now that I can't think, and when I go to speak, I can't think of what to say. John Gray is coming to-night for good. I hope that you two won't make any noise together."

A chill fell on Electa's heart. What noise could they two make? Mustn't they speak aloud? Must they whisper?

"Mr. Ryle is coming this afternoon," she said, as hopefully as she could speak.

"I hope so. I shall send John for him if he doesn't. I want to see him on business of great importance. I wish to consult him and ask his advice."

"Vail said once that his heart was crowded with things. Is yours too?"

"Yes, child," she answered gravely.

The sun was shining, that was something; it was more than something to Electa. She went to the window and stood in the sunshine. It might rain again some day; but she would not spoil her sunshine by thinking of it now.

"Grandma!" she began brightly.

There came something sweeter than sunshine into Miss Westlake's face.

"I want to go out and take a walk."

"No; you mustn't. The ground is soaked through; you would get a cough or a chill. You may walk out on the bricks and see Lily, if you want to."

"I want to go outside the gates."

"There'll be no need of your ever going^o out when John Gray comes. He'll do all the errands.

"But he can't take a walk for me."

"You can take a walk next summer; I'm afraid something will happen to you unless I go with you to take care of you."

Electa laughed with tears in her eyes. "Why, grandma, mamma lets Guy go out to play alone."

"She has somebody else and I only have you."

"What may I do this afternoon, then?"

"I'll get Patty's things for you, and then I want you to help me get mother's room ready for me to sleep in; she died in the bedroom next to the room she used to sit in. Patty used to say she wanted to die there; but she was taken sick in the night, and after that I couldn't move her. Mother's things are there just as she left them."

Patty's jewels were not many, but there was something for mamma and each of the girls. The watch she chose for Celia, a cameo pin for mamma, a solitaire diamond ring for Nan, and a cluster diamond ring for Mollie; remembering that Robin was tired of diamonds, she selected for her a ring with a moss agate; there were pearl ear-rings for Trude, and a large, heavy gold pencil that she was undecided how to apportion. She had the beads and cross for herself; she could not give the pencil to one of the boys, for she had nothing for the others; papa had a pencil already; why not give the pencil to the other grandchild, John Gray?

Miss Westlake looked pleased at the suggestion, and laid it away to present it to him herself. It should be in token of what was afterward to come.

The shutters of the down-stairs sleeping room were thrown open, the pale, November sunlight shone in, every thing was in order, there was no dust anywhere. How familiar and homelike that room became to Electa afterward. The chintz curtains, the worn carpet, the cane-seated chairs, the pink and white quilt, the leather bound Bible, became a part of her daily life.

"I'll sleep here to-night," said Miss Westlake.

"Alone?"

"Yes, alone. You can go back to your own room, and John shall have Patty's room. Now we are all fixed for good."

For good? Yes, it must be for good, Electa

thought. "I shall have a letter to-night, and I shall see Mr. Ryle, and John Gray will be here. Oh, how many good things are happening to me."

In the joy of her heart Miss Westlake laughed aloud. If the child only knew all the good things that were happening to her. "You are the good thing that has happened to me," she said; "my best happening for fifty years."

After that, how could Electa ever wish that she might go home?

"There are sixty-five acres of land that belong to this house," Miss Westlake said after a moment.

"And will you let John Gray farm next spring? Wouldn't you love to see things growing?"

"I believe I would," she answered slowly; "I almost believe I would. It will take me a long time after being so long buried to come out and live."

"Mr. Ryle will be here soon, perhaps," said Electa; "may I brush your hair? It's so pretty I love to touch it."

If any thing were to bring her back to life, was it not God's love in her heart and the touch of young fingers about her? As she brushed her hair Electa sang softly.

"Are you going to fix yourself up to see the minister?"

The brown dress was rather shabby, but the blue merino must be kept for Sundays and holidays, for the world outside the gate. She looked down upon her dress very seriously, there was a

yellowish spot on the front of the skirt made one day when she was making lemonade for papa, the trimming on the sleeves was frayed and a rent in one sleeve had been carefully darned. She could not do any thing to make herself look pretty, unless it were to bathe her face anew and unbraid her hair and let it fall upon her shoulders in the little-girl fashion that Mrs. Ryle had liked. She thought of her ruffle box, but there were only six yards of ruffling; if that must last six months, she must save it for greater occasions; she could not afford a fresh ruffle in her neck to-day; she had a silk handkerchief with a cream-colored centre and rose border, she would tie that about her neck—that would have to do. She half sighed and then laughed. It was very funny that all the “dressing up” she could do was to wash her face and comb her hair.

“Be bright and sweet, and make the best of your dress,” mamma always said.

“What are you laughing at, child? I hope that you haven’t any grown-up ideas in your head!”

“No, grandma, not one. Celia and Mollie and Nan and Robin have all the grown-up ideas.”

“My mother was married at fifteen.”

“Trude’s age. Oh, how funny! There couldn’t have been any little girls in old times.”

“What are little girls like now?”

“Like me, only sweeter and brighter. I wish you could see all our little girls at home.”

“One is enough for me, dear.”

Electa bent and impulsively kissed the soft, white head.

"Nothing is real but God's will. My life has been full of imaginings. The real part has been God's thoughts. Child, my heart *is* crowded with things. I want Mr. Ryle to set my thoughts in array before me, and plan for me."

"He knows how to do that."

"I want to be alone a little while to think."

Electa went upstairs singing: "One more day's work for Jesus."

"I want *this* day's work to be for Him," Miss Westlake said aloud. She had a habit of talking aloud.

Electa thought to be "bright and sweet" was oftentimes the hardest work in the world; to-day she was forcing herself to be both. She could not have a talk with Mr. Ryle, for Cousin Jane would keep him all to herself; she wished to ask him about providences. Perhaps he would not come again for a long while. All the long afternoon she watched for him, wrapping herself in a shawl and sitting on the carpet under the window in "mother's room," with her elbows on the window-sill that she might look down the road towards Walnut Grove.

"Nothing is real but God's will," Miss Westlake said aloud, sitting alone over the fire as night fell.

Just now there was nothing real to Electa but the gathering twilight, nothing real but the darkness that was shutting down over her world and

shutting out the friend that had not come. But the darkness could not keep her letter from coming. John Gray would surely come, if he could make satisfactory arrangements with Mr. Morris; even if he could not, he would come to bring her letter. But perhaps no one had written to her! The long evening and then the night upstairs alone. Oh, if the sun would never set! If it would only never be dark! Her face had grown pale, her fingers had stiffened with cold, she was chilled from head to foot, her throat was sore and her head ached. If she were ill, would Celia come? Had she not been very brave, a wave of homesickness would have overwhelmed her. It grew too dark to distinguish any thing; there was not any thing that looked like a human being far or near; nothing but the lights that flashed out in kitchen windows where supper was being prepared for fathers and mothers, big brothers and sisters, and little children; where supper-tables with more than two plates and two cups and saucers were being set. She arose stiffened with cold, too weary to cry, desolate and sick at heart. As she crossed the hall the murmur of voices reached her. Mr. Ryle had come, or John Gray. She hastily opened the door of the sitting-room, the voices were in the kitchen.

Cousin Jane was saying—no she could not be saying such a thing—"I want to give the house and land, sixty-five acres, and one thousand dollars to her, to do just as she likes with; but I don't



want her to know—I want her to love me for myself.”

Poor Electa! A flush of surprise and gladness, then a dropping of the head in bitterness of spirit.

“The child does love me; she kissed my old head to-day, that kiss and those letters—”

Cousin Jane was weeping.

Very softly and slowly she attempted to close the door, but she could not avoid hearing: “I couldn’t enjoy her love if I thought she knew.”

A moment she stood as if paralyzed. What could she do? Rush in and shriek out that she knew it all and beg her to take it back?

“Oh, mamma! Oh, Celia!” she groaned aloud; “oh, somebody come and tell me what to do.”

But did Cousin Jane mean her? Did she say “Lecty?” Did she say “she” or “her”? Perhaps it was “he” and “him,” and she might have meant John Gray? But no one beside herself had kissed her hair that day. What had Cousin Jane said? What had she overheard? The house and land and a thousand dollars for somebody to do as she liked with, and that somebody mustn’t know; she must love Cousin Jane for herself and not for what she would give her. It would break Cousin Jane’s heart if she knew that she knew; she would not, she could not, be happy in love and caresses and kindnesses that she had bought with house and land and money. She dared not tell her, she dared not keep it to herself; how could she be natural and free with her ever again? Would she brush

her hair for money? Kiss her good-night for money? Read to her and sing to her for house and land? She could not lift her eyes to her; her secret would reveal itself a dozen times a day in her constrained manner and hard-earned services. What she was loving to do for love's sake would be intolerable if done for reward. No more her servant for Jesus' sake; she would be her servant for a house and a thousand dollars and sixty-five acres of land. "I wanted to do it for Jesus," she sobbed.

A step entering the sitting-room startled her into motion; she fled upstairs, away from the faces she dreaded, cowering in the darkness of her chamber, afraid and ashamed, not knowing what to do, and not daring to do the only thing that she felt it right to do.

"She would say I listened," she said chokingly; "she would never believe in me again. Oh, why did I *have* to open that door just that minute?"

"Lecty! Lecty!" called the quavering voice at the foot of the stairs. There was a joyful thrill in the voice and a tone of tenderness that wrung the girl's heart. Cousin Jane felt that she owned her now; she had the right to give, but, oh, what right had *she* to take?

"I do love her more than ever," she thought, straightening herself, "but I shan't dare to show it. I shall feel as if she knew I knew."

"Lecty! Lecty! Where are you, child?"

"Yes'm, in two minutes," she answered clearly.

She would have been glad if she might have made the two minutes two hours. Miss Westlake met her on the stairs, they passed each other in silence.

"Mr. Ryle is there," said Miss Westlake from the top of the stairs; "but he can't stay long."

A very serious face greeted him; she had forgotten that she could not "dress up" to see him. Had she remembered it she would have wondered how she could be childish enough to care. She was not a little girl now, she was growing old.

"The child is homesick," he thought, "and no wonder."

"Has the time seemed long to you?" he asked, keeping her hand in his as they both stood before the fire.

"Oh, so long! When did you bring me? Only Friday night."

"You haven't heard from home?"

"From home? from the boys and Robin and Trude, and oh, a letter from Celia! I found it in my trunk. Celia never forgets."

Miss Westlake had gone up to Patty's chamber; kneeling there alone in the cold, with her hands tightly clasped, she was crying out with tears: "O, Master of my house, may Thy will be in my will; make my will for me and give me the hearts of these children. I am alone down here but for them. My generation has passed away."

Mr. Ryle seated himself in Miss Westlake's rocker; Electa stood beside him troubled and grave.

"Did you expect me Saturday?"

"Yes, sir."

"I was detained."

"I knew that. I watched for you all this afternoon; I did not see you come."

"I did not come through Walnut Grove; I have been here an hour, listening to Miss Westlake and talking to her."

"Would you like to—but you don't care,—would you like to know about my letters?"

"I do care, I care very much."

"Celia's was the best. Oh, if she were only here now."

"Is something troubling you? Can't you tell me, or my mother?"

"No, not yet; I can't tell any body yet; it would hurt somebody if I should tell. It would be hard to tell, but I *could* if it were not for hurting Cousin Jane."

"My mother is quite ill; she fell down three steps this morning, jarring herself considerably; Mercy was busy and did not find her for an hour, and I was out; she is very quiet, but I fear that she is injured more than she confesses."

"Does she suffer much? Oh, I am so sorry!"

"I think she does; I would not have left her, but I felt that you might need me, and I knew nothing but that Miss Patty was buried."

"I thank you very much; don't stay another minute, she will miss you; it hasn't killed me yet, and I shall have another letter from Celia to-night. She won't mind if I read you a little of her letter;

oh, I know what I will do! I will give you all three letters—hers and Robin's and Trude's—to read to your mother. I want to do something for her and that's all I can do. Cousin Jane will not like to stay alone; I wish I could go to her; I think she liked to have me near her."

Electa spoke eagerly and tremulously.

"I am sure of it. As soon as Miss Westlake can spare you I'll come for you, and you shall have a day and a night with mother. Your mother has sent three girls out from the home nest, I wonder if she wouldn't send another. My mother needs one of them."

"Nan or Mollie or Celia! Wouldn't it be lovely? Wouldn't it be too good? If Celia would come I'd never be troubled any more. Did I tell you that John Gray and I are to call Cousin Jane grandma? She's the loveliest grandmother out of a book."

"We had a long talk about John Gray. This dear old lady is his inheritance."

Electa colored painfully; she stammered attempting to speak. "I don't want her house and land to be my inheritance," she tried to say, "I want her to know I love her because she is lovely." But her words were only a confused sound; Mr. Ryle hastened to interrupt her: "As soon as my mother is better I shall have business that will take me within twenty miles of The Beehive; would you like to send any thing?"

"Are you going there? Oh, I wish,—but no, I

don't want to go, but—if Cousin—grandma wants to send me, you will take me!"

"Yes, I'll take you."

"Are you going soon?"

"As soon as I may leave home."

"I have something to send to them all, if I don't go—I may go—I don't know. Is it a providence that you are moved to go?" she asked seriously.

"I hope so," he answered, turning to meet her eyes and smile; "and not to me only."

"Then—are you—" she hesitated. "I beg your pardon."

"You mean am I going to be married?" he said.

"I did mean that."

"Sometime, I hope."

"Has your mother seen her?"

"No."

"Is every thing a providence?" she asked after a moment.

"What *is* a providence? Tell me."

"Something provided, isn't it?" she said quickly.

"Just that; every thing that God provides is His providence; every thing that He takes out of His great provision-house and gives to you; every thing that He has laid up for you, stored for you, every thought He moves you to think, every step He urges you to take, every ill He prevents, every good thing He gives, all come of His providence. He gives to you and it is in your hand to make of it what you will. You can turn it to good or evil as you choose. The steps of a good man are or-



dered of the Lord, even his steps across the room; all his steps in life; his steps backward as well as his steps forward."

A startled look grew into Electa's eyes. He had ordered her steps, then, and Cousin Jane's words, that they might be brought together; the footsteps meeting the words and the words the footsteps.

"All the secret providences, too? The things that nobody knows but you?"

"The things that nobody knows but you are the things that make life significant; the things that nobody knows are the things that make the difference between your life and another life. Is this you? a girl in a brown dress with long hair and a serious face standing in the dim light in an old-fashioned room, all her life just now to live alone with an old lady and wait upon her—a dull, uneventful life, morning, noon, and night, morning, noon, and night, as the days go on, and that's all! Is that all?"

"No, that is only the outside, and the outside is almost nothing."

"Your secret things are the springs of your life, the secrets that you and God have together."

Then she was not bearing it alone, for God knew about it, too. The flash of light and flush of color were her only reply.

"The reward is open, that may be revealed while the secret is kept."

"But it isn't always reward. Isn't it sometimes punishment?"

"It is reward if we obey; it is sore punishment if we disobey."

"How can we obey if we don't know what is right to do?"

"I think that we can always see that one thing is more right than another; it is more right to speak, or more right to keep silence; more right to give, or more right to refrain from giving; do all you know until you know more. We all know *something*. God means every providence to be a blessing; we can by obedience keep it a blessing or by disobedience turn it to our own hurt. Every providence is a trial to see if we will do God's will or not. God is able to take care of His own providences; all we have to do is to obey. Keep your eyes open and you will see God's hand in every happening, your heart open and you will feel His love in every happening. Not one hair falls out of your head without Him."

A long light hair had fallen and lay upon her shoulder; he took it into his hand and twined it about his finger.

"You were not conscious of this, but He knew it; and if He know and care about this, doesn't He know and care about, plan and provide for, every perplexity and trial? If you were troubled while this hair was falling, did He know about the hair and not about the trouble? This hair is the least thing about you; was its weight any thing? And if He know this, how much more does He know the greater things, the weights, the burdens? The

hairs of your head are many, but not too many for Him to count; even if your perplexities be as many, He can, and does, count them, too. They are not too many for Him, not too little; isn't the thing that is troubling you now more to you and to Him than this hair of your head? Shall I give you something to remember? 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God.'

"That is what I lack now—wisdom."

"If you lack any longer, it is your own fault."

"Yes, I see that," she said slowly.

"I can look back in my own life and see link after link in His chain of providence, such little things to link together such great things; if I had not sought His will and obeyed, this or that would not have come to pass, and because of this and that, precious blessings have come to me. I lost the train and decided to stay another day, and that is how your father happened to meet me and ask me to spend that evening at The Beehive; and, after seeing you all once, how could I forbear staying another day that I might see you all again? And one reason that you are here is because your father trusted me to have the oversight of you; notice how our lives are interlinked; and John Gray is here because of you and me. I lost that train because I chose to call upon a stranger who was ill among strangers. If our choosings or refusings are that we may do God's will, be sure that, whatever the loss or difficulty, He will cause all to work together for good, even our mistakes."

"Will He bring good out of the mistakes?" Electa asked hurriedly.

"Assuredly; we shall suffer loss through them, and others may suffer loss also, but good will be worked out through all, to ourselves and to others. We may not, we can not live isolated lives; my providence is your providence, your providence is my providence. In His providences God speaks to us about Himself, to teach us about ourselves, and, oh, how certainly, to teach us for others. Every choice you make blesses another or hurts another; the choice some other makes touches your life."

"That is true," said Electa sadly, thinking of Miss Westlake's choosing secrecy about the will.

"That makes life very hard work," she added.

"It makes life very blessed work," returned Mr. Ryle. "Just think; every time you choose to do God's will you are a blessing to somebody. The world is better, dear child, because you, little unknown maiden, have chosen to serve the Lord. God needs you to bless others with. Don't you know Christ said: 'For *their* sakes I sanctify Myself'? For their sakes, for the sake of every one whose life touches yours, or ever will touch it, be brave and true and faithful and unselfish and wise."

The sympathy of the tone was almost too much for her self-restraint; she turned from him and looked towards the window out into the darkness. The mystery of all her future was with God; it was a glad mystery since God's providence was her inheritance. How relieved she would have been



had she known that Mr. Ryle had heard the quick opening and the cautious closing of the door, that he had even caught a glimpse of her face in that one startled glance, that he had divined the cause of her perplexity, and was wondering what she would think it right to do about it. If she might have poured her burden out in words half its weight would have been lifted. It was pressing down upon her, choking her.

"Electa."

Slowly she turned and listened.

"I have something good to tell you; Miss Westlake asked me to tell you; she knew that you could be a secret-keeper."

"Yes, sir," said Electa, her heart giving a great leap. Had she decided that she might know, that it would not hinder her enjoyment of her to know that she, Electa, knew that she had given house and land and money for her presence and her love?

"No one is to know it."

"Yes, sir; I won't tell even Celia," she said, trying to speak quietly.

"I am to come here some day this week with a lawyer that she may make her will; she has considerably more money than I supposed; it is quite a little fortune; I have been looking over her bank-books. Years ago her sister willed all her property to her. She intends to adopt John Gray, to give him a liberal education; he is to choose any profession that he wishes to, and then he may travel for a year before he settles down to work; he is to

have an income for five years after he has settled himself to his work, that he may enjoy his work, and not feel straitened; she said, after that, two thirds of the income is to be given to the Old Lady's Home in Swanzey, the one third he is to retain until his death, and then, not the interest, but the principal is to be given to any one he may designate."

"I'm very glad for John Gray," she said wondering if that were all the good news. "I hope he won't know until he loves her dearly for her own sake, and then she won't have to be disappointed about that. I don't like to have her disappointed."

"He will not go away to school until next fall, probably; she wants to keep him with her for a while. What a fine thing it is for the boy!"

"And for her," said Electa; "she will have him if I go, so I shan't mind so much."

"She gives for love's sake, she wishes him to take for love's sake."

Was Mr. Ryle thinking it strange that she did not ask if he would have the house and land, also? Might she asked unconcernedly: "Who will have the house?" But that would involve deceit; she would be acting as though she did not know, when she did know; but did she certainly know? She stood straight and still, for one moment her burden seemed greater than she could bear. Mr. Ryle could feel her repressed eagerness, her anxiety to speak, her anxiety not to speak. Last Monday night she was a little girl at home, sing-

ing and telling stories to Guy and Vail in the twilight: to-night she was so far away from home growing old.

"He does love her now," she said, bringing herself back from the twilight at home, from the pressure of Guy's arms about her neck and from the sound of Vail's voice; "he is to do the errands, feed Lily, and make the fires this winter for his board and six dollars a month; he doesn't want to take the money, but Cous—grandma insisted, and said that business was business; I am to help her make his shirts, and he is to have a handsome suit for Christmas, overcoat and boots and all; I wonder when it all began."

"It began with her years ago, when she began longing for a child to love; it may have been that the child was given to his mother in pain and sorrow and great weariness of heart, and to her in answer to her longing, which was prayer, he is given in great joy; with John, his inheritance began that dark night that father and mother forsook him and left him out in the world; with you—"

"The interlinking began when I began to want so to do something for somebody; I was willing to do any thing and every thing, as I do do for grandma. When did it begin with you, Mr. Ryle?"

"The moment that I decided to lose the train that I might visit that sick stranger; I trust that a blessing will come to my mother through that."

Electa dared not ask what the blessing was; his

next words were spoken to himself: "I want my mother to see my wife before she dies."

"Perhaps John Gray will be too independent to be adopted," suggested Electa.

"He will be spending her money for her in the way that pleases her best; he can not refuse out of sheer self-will and pride this money, this opportunity that God gives him; I think he is willing for God to use him in any way."

Would she be refusing God's good gift if she should confess that she overheard? It never occurred to her to believe that Miss Westlake would think her blameless; her one fear was that she would treat her as an eaves-dropper, and never trust her again. The brands on the hearth fell apart, the room was almost dark; Electa stood bending forward with both hands upon the arm of Mr. Ryle's chair, her hair falling upon his shoulder.

"You are coming this week?" she said.

"Thursday afternoon, if I am not prevented."

"I shall have till Thursday then," she said aloud, startling herself at her own utterance.

"My mother will be expecting me," Mr. Ryle said rising.

"Oh, I wish I was going with you," she cried; "I would rather stay with your mother."

"I wish you were for her sake; do you wish very much to return? Miss Westlake will be very comfortable with John Gray; you are not compelled to stay; you may have your choice."

"I know it; I do want to go home; I am not

very brave. But Cousin Jane needs me—no," catching her breath quickly, "I will stay."

"My mother will thank you much for the pleasure of the letters; she feels quite at home at The Beehive."

The letters were in her pocket, it was a little hard to let them go. Celia's was considerably crumpled.

"This is Celia's," she said, laying it in his hand. "I have read it to pieces."

Not a flush, but a slight change of color, a leaping of something into his eyes betokened deep feeling as the letter touched his hand; it was too dark for Electa to see his face distinctly; she would have wondered and been puzzled had she seen it.

"Excuse me; I forgot to light the candles; don't go away in the dark."

She lighted a candle with the feeling that she must look upon his face before he went away, his was the face of a friend, and there were so few friends near her. As the slow candle-light fell upon his face she saw the something new in his eyes. He colored as her eyes met his and then laughed.

"Good-night, little sister," he said.

"Good-night, big brother," she returned.

She had no time to be homesick, wood must be brought in for the evening fire, the tea-kettle put on, and the tea-table set. And she had until Thursday to decide. She set the table for three, she could not bring herself to think that she might

be disappointed about John Gray coming; he had promised to bring all his books, and they were to study together. He was to be her teacher.

Coming down-stairs from the chilliness and darkness upstairs, Miss Westlake opened the door into warmth and brightness, a blaze upon the hearth, the pretty tea-table, the busy hand-maiden, and the low, sweet music of a hymn.

"It's all too good for me, Lord," she said in her heart; "but don't take it away."

"Aren't you cold, grandma, staying upstairs so long?" cried the little hand-maiden, turning from the contemplation of the tea-table. "John Gray is coming and we'll study and sing and read to you and have a lovely evening. And you'll sleep in that cosey room and be as comfortable as a queen."

"With only two subjects in my kingdom. If my heart didn't ache so with missing poor Patty, I should be the happiest old woman in the world. I miss her at every turn and with every breath. I miss doing for her. I must have somebody to do for."

"She doesn't want to come back," said Electa, setting a candlestick in the centre of the table, and wishing that she had a vase of flowers to stand there instead.

"No, no, no; but I would like her to see how changed and pleasant it is here to-night."

"I wonder if she is wishing that you were up there to see how pleasant it is up there to-night."

"But she can't miss me, for she has the Lord," said Miss Westlake.

"Don't we have Him down here, too?" asked Electa shyly. Electa could not talk about the Lord as Robin and Celia could.

Miss Westlake made no answer, but for days and days the thought filled her heart and mind. How could she for one instant have forgotten that He was down here, too?

"Shall we wait for John Gray?" asked Electa.

"Yes, we'll wait a while."

The tea-kettle was singing in the kitchen, the flames were curling in and out among the round sticks of wood upon the hearth. So sensitive was she to every motion of life that the singing of the tea-kettle helped her to bear the burden of her secret; while the fire burned so brightly it did not seem as if Cousin Jane could be displeased with her and send her away.

"There he is!" cried Miss Westlake as the sound of whistling burst out into the night outside: "how queer it does seem to have a boy about. I had a brother who used to whistle sixty years ago. I almost don't know whether it is then or now."

"I know it is now," said Electa rising to take the candle out to the shed. "And he whistles because he has a letter for me. That is to be our sign all winter."

The letter was from Celia, a sheet of foolscap well filled; after Electa had eagerly run through it she looked up to meet Miss Westlake's wistful eyes.

"You shall hear it, grandma, it is full of home."

John Gray stayed two hours with them; he read aloud for an hour, and then the children sang together the old church hymns.

"Not one moment for study," sighed Electa as the clock struck nine.

John Gray would not be allowed to leave Mr. Morris until the last day of December; he promised to spend the intervening Sabbaths with them, and to come every evening and stay until the clock struck nine.

They felt very much alone after he bade them good-night, and Electa bolted the door of the shed.

"I think I'll go to bed, my dear," said Miss Westlake, taking a candle.

Electa longed to kiss her good-night; it would be like home to kiss some one good-night, but her secret came between them and instead she said, "Good-night, grandma, pleasant dreams."

"My dreams are coming true," returned Miss Westlake; "I don't need to dream any more."

Electa snuffed the candle when she was left alone and, crouching over the fire for the sake of its companionship, opened her letter to read it again.

Deeply absorbed in it, suddenly she started violently, springing to her feet; was that a tap on the window? But, no, there was not a sound; had she fallen asleep over her letter, or was it one of the home noises that she heard?

The shutters were closed, the curtains dropped,

every outside door was locked or barred; how silly she was to imagine things! She would rather sleep on the sofa in this room than go upstairs to sleep alone, but grandma might not like it; she had taken it for granted that she was willing to sleep upstairs alone. She would not be afraid to sleep alone up in heaven, why should she be afraid down here when the Lord was down here as really as up there? Assuring and reassuring herself that she did not mind it at all, she took her candle and went upstairs; there was a movement within Miss Westlake's room as she paused for one hesitating instant at her door.

She kept Celia's letter in her hand while she was undressing and kept it in her hand as she lay down to sleep, "My dear little sister," it seemed to be saying over and over again. She would be brave and good, she would confess about the will, she would not care if she did not find time to study with John Gray, she would—she would—

Had she been asleep? Was that that noise again? A door had certainly been shut and that was the sound of a stealthy step upon the stairs; it was coming nearer and nearer—it was stopping at her door—her door was opening—some one was breathing near her; she dared not stir or shriek—she covered her head with the blanket, and thought that her heart stopped beating. A hand was on the bed-clothes, it was drawing the blanket away from her head.

"Lecty," whispered Miss Westlake.

With a great leap her heart began to beat again; she gasped, she could not catch her breath to speak.

"I thought you might like me to sleep with you; I was going to call you to come down, but was afraid of frightening you. Have you been asleep?"

"I don't know," said Electa, drawing a long breath.

"I'm glad I didn't startle you; I knocked my candlestick off the table while I was undressing; noises sound so loud in this house."

With the reaction came a burst of tears; Celia's letter was very wet.

"Nobody is here but me," she sobbed, as Miss Westlake lay calmly asleep beside her; "all the others are having a good time."



XII.

UNTIL THURSDAY.

"I have until Thursday," she said to herself Tuesday morning. "I have until Thursday," she said to herself Tuesday evening. "I have until to-morrow," she said many times during Wednesday.

The clock struck nine Wednesday evening. John Gray dropped "Southern Africa" in the middle of a sentence. He had been reading aloud for an hour; Miss Westlake had listened with her eyes upon his face and her hands folded in her lap. The first hour of the evening had been given to the recital of hymns, Electa and John had sat at the table with the hymn book open between them; in a sweet, drawling monotonous tone Miss Westlake had repeated many hymns while they gravely followed the lines, turning leaf after leaf with no evidence of impatience. As they closed the hymn book she said, "Now you sing to me."

"What shall we sing?" asked Electa.

"Any thing, every thing,"

When Electa laughingly declared that she had sung every thing she had ever heard of, Miss

Westlake exclaimed in a wide-awake tone, "Now we'll have 'Southern Africa.'"

Electa watched the clock during the whole hour of the reading, peeping now and then into the Latin Grammar, and Mental Philosophy, and sketching John's head and the Franklin on a slip of paper that she had found in his atlas.

"The clock struck nine. The tempting pile of books was untouched; the first lesson in shorthand and Latin was not even begun.

"I must go, grandma," said John; "I'll come again to-morrow night."

With a candlestick in her hand Electa followed him into the woodshed.

"John," she began.

"Well," he assented after a long pause, "can't you think of the rest of it?"

"I can think of it," stooping to pick up a chip and then tossing it away; "but I don't know how to put it into words."

"That is something new for you."

"It is altogether something new to me; I never had a secret before."

"Happy girl."

"Don't laugh at me," she cried earnestly, trouble gathering in her eyes; "suppose you knew something—you didn't want to know it, but you did; the knowledge was thrust upon you—and it concerned somebody that you loved and you could not decide whether to tell or not, what would you do?"

"I wouldn't do any thing until I knew what to do."

"But suppose you had to do something to prevent something?" she said anxiously.

"Then I'd wait and consider until I could decide. I'd consider whether the something ought to be prevented or not."

"But suppose you did consider and couldn't decide?"

"Then I'd consider again."

"But I must decide before a certain time or the thing will be done."

"How do you know it will be done?" he asked quickly.

"It will be unless some great thing happens to prevent."

"Do you hold the happening in your hand? It doesn't look strong enough to hold much of a happening," he said, looking at the slight hand that grasped the candlestick

"What I do may prevent something; it will certainly take the sweetness out of something; somebody will be disappointed if I tell, and yet I must tell or I'll be deceitful; I can't be deceitful, I can't look into the eyes that I'm keeping a secret from—it isn't my secret either; it is the person's whom I am deceiving."

"You can help being deceitful, but you can't help the disappointment; the disappointment isn't in your hand that I can see; there is nothing in your hand but whether you will do right or do

wrong. What happens next you have nothing to do with. Does that simplify it?"

"Yes."

"Will it make a disappointment for you?"

"Yes,—I think it will; it will take something away from me that I want; the more I think of it the more I want it. I may go home; but you are so kind to grandma that she will not miss me much."

"I don't want you to go home; I shall not like it so well here without you."

"I do not understand any thing but that I must do right; I can't be happy till I do it—it will be about the hardest thing I ever did. I can't feel near to people as you do,—even grandma, sometimes, is like a stranger to me. Good-night."

"Good-night," he said, lingering with his hand upon the wooden bolt of the door. "I wish I could keep it from being so hard. Tell me and let me do it for you."

"I would, but it isn't my secret," she said.

"I don't want you to lose something you want."

"I don't want to give it up; if I do give it up, I can not do the work in the world that I want to do, and I want to have a calling, *to be called* as well as you."

"Perhaps you are imagining it all; I mean imagining that you ought to tell. I see that you are all twisted up and mixed up."

"That's what troubles me,—suppose it doesn't concern me at all, but somebody else; I am so mixed up. But if it isn't I, who is it?"

"Oh, you goosie, goosie, goosie," laughed John Gray.

"My courage is oozing all out at my finger-tips; when you come again it will be all over."

John opened the door and looked out. The wind blew the snow directly into their faces.

"Whew! a snow-storm!" he exclaimed.

"Then you can stay all night," she said joyfully.

"No, I can't. It may be worse in the morning, and I must be there early in the morning. I know what these long storms are. Good-night and do untwist yourself."

Electa was half asleep when Miss Westlake aroused her by saying: "I think John Gray likes me."

"I *know* he does," Electa replied emphatically.

"And not for any selfish reason, not for what he can get out of me."

"He wouldn't be so mean," returned Electa indignantly.

"Perhaps I am peculiar, but my heart would turn very hard against any body who pretended to like me for what they could get out of me."

"Do you wish that you were a poor old woman then, with nothing but love to give?"

"I should be less suspicious, maybe."

Might she confess now? But Miss Westlake's voice had grown hard and sharp. It would be easier to do in the dark, when she could not see her face grow cold and stern, and to-morrow night it would be too late. She had not known her a

week; oh, if she might wait until she was not at all strange to her! If Celia could come and help her through! If she might tell Mr. Ryle and beg him to confess it for her! She would have to go home and tell her story; she would have to go home without the hundred dollars for Trude.

"But John Gray don't know," said the old voice eagerly and tremulously.

"How could he know!" said Electa, her own voice trembling.

"He couldn't overhear, nobody could tell him, —it will spoil it all if he knows."

"Don't be troubled," comforted Electa tenderly; "I know you will not be disappointed in this; I want you to enjoy it through and through."

"I can't if there's a kink in it."

It was long before Electa could sleep; she formed plan after plan; at first she decided to ask Mr. Ryle to take her home with him, she would write to Cousin Jane and await her reply at the parsonage. She would come back if Cousin Jane urged it; but if not, send for her trunk and go home; she had been out in the world, how glad she would be to fly back to the dear home nest! Then she decided that such a running away would appear cowardly; she had not done any wrong thing, why not stay and be brave? Mr. Ryle might confess it for her, and she would stand at his side, keeping hold of his hand; but how childish that was! She would confess herself, she would say: "Last Monday afternoon—" No, she would begin: "I am so

sorry, I don't want you to be disappointed—" But suppose Cousin Jane should interrupt her with: "You are taking a great deal for granted! So you expect something for taking care of me?" But she did kiss her hair that day? No one else did that. But she spoke about letters. What letters? Perhaps some one had written to her and helped her; it might have happened before she came. Of course Cousin Jane had not meant herself at all. How she was twisted up! But that kiss! Was that kiss one of the providences to help her through? It was a little thing, but so were the hairs of her head. She did not wish this time for a shining light to help her through, she did not even think of opening the Bible for a sign, she knew that she might ask for wisdom and that she must do the thing that seemed the nearest right.

"Thursday! Thursday!" was knocking at her brain before she was awake Thursday morning. She opened her eyes upon the dull, misty dawn and closed them again to ponder and pray. To-day she must decide. The idea that perhaps Miss Westlake had not been alluding to herself had so seized and possessed her that she was filled with terror at the thought of confessing that she had listened; when she first began to think of it, the thought was "overheard," now in her bewilderment and self-accusing, it had shaped itself into the repulsive form, "listened"; at first she intended to "acknowledge," now, she was forcing herself to "confess." Yes, she had certainly listened, for she

might have closed the door more quickly, or she might have fled from the voice without waiting to shut the door. Thoroughly confused and wearied she lay half awake and half asleep.

"Ask Mr. Ryle if it were you, and then you can decide what to do."

Was the voice inside of herself or outside of herself? Was the suggestion in answer to her pleading for wisdom? When God spoke by His Spirit did He utter such commonplace, every-day words as these? He spoke in Samuel's ear once and they were words as easy to be understood, as plain to follow as these words! These words were not Bible words, they were not solemn and grave; they were not prefaced with: "Thus saith the Lord;" Celia might have spoken the same words. But, oh, what a relief they were! Now the darkness was made light; there was something for her to do that she could do. It was the doing nothing that was unbearable.

If it were not herself, that was the end of it; if it were, why, she must do the next thing. And then, when it was over, and she was still enough to think, she would ask Mr. Ryle about the Spirit speaking, how He spoke and what He spoke. She could not remember—she could not remember any thing; Vail was shouting that it was a jolly snow-storm and Celia was bidding her to cook papa's eggs just five minutes and not to let the water boil. She opened her eyes suddenly, the snow was falling thick and fast; she must

have been asleep again, for Cousin Jane had risen and gone down-stairs. She remembered that Cousin Jane had said last night that she must rise early this morning. And what good thing had happened? Now she knew; she had decided to ask Mr. Ryle. It must be very early or very stormy, for she could scarcely see to dress; she was tempted to lie down again, only it was selfish to let grandma kindle both fires and prepare the breakfast. With a light heart, for it was to be a busy day and a happy day, she hastened down-stairs. There was no fire in the Franklin, the ashes were raked over the coals as they were left last night, the fire in the kitchen stove had not been kindled; the stove doors had been opened and a newspaper and pieces of kindling laid in ready to light. The door into the shed stood open.

"Grandma! grandma!" she called, going to the open door. "Oh, why grandma!" she cried, almost shrieking as she spoke. Upon the ground among the chips Miss Westlake lay, with her face turned from her, as motionless as if she were dead. "Oh, grandma," springing towards her, "Are you sick or hurt?"

The head turned slowly; Miss Westlake spoke with a slow, thick, uncertain utterance. "Don't be frightened; I fell down; I can't take care of my head; can you help me up?"

"Are you hurt anywhere?" asked Electa, trying to raise her shoulders.

"I don't know; I feel very queer—I thought I was dying."

With both arms she attempted to lift her, but she was a dead weight; she grasped Electa with her left arm, her right arm dropped to her side as she tried to lift it.

"I can't steady myself," she moaned.

With all her might Electa sought to lift her; after some time she succeeded in raising her to her feet, but as she sought to guide her with her arms about her waist, Cousin Jane staggered and fell forward upon her face.

Electa rolled her over upon her side, kneeling beside her with both arms around her.

"You can't get me in," Miss Westlake said after a moment.

"I see that I can't; I must leave you here and go for some one."

Very gently she laid her head back upon the ground; she remembered to have seen brandy and hartshorn in the chimney closet in the sitting-room; hastening in, she returned with the bottles and a spoon. She sprinkled the hartshorn upon the bosom of her dress and fed her two teaspoonfuls of brandy. The color came slowly to Miss Westlake's lips, but there was a film over her eyes, and her lips seemed to have lost their control.

"Go to the first house," she managed to say.

"And leave you here? Oh, I don't want to do that," cried Electa in a distressed voice; "if John Gray had only stayed all night."

"Put on your rubbers; don't get lost—or get cold."

Electa stood a moment thinking, then went into Miss Westlake's down-stairs sleeping room and brought blankets and pillows; she placed the pillows under her head and shoulders and wrapped her in the blankets.

"I'll leave the brandy and hartshorn close to your hand; be sure to use them if you feel faint, won't you?"

"Yes."

"Can you see me, grandma?" she asked, kneeling beside her and taking her right hand.

"Not very well. I expect Lily is hungry, don't forget to feed her. Do you know how to milk?"

"No; but I'll find somebody that does know how."

"Patty would be frightened; I'm glad she isn't here. Be quick and don't get lost."

Electa kissed her hand two or three times.

"Pray—before you go."

Aloud did she mean? for her or with her?

"Pray out loud."

With her hand in both hers Electa prayed aloud, in a clear, trembling voice: "Oh, Lord Jesus, please take care of her and don't let her grow worse while I am gone, and help me to find somebody. And forgive us all our sins, and teach us to obey Thee, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

Without waiting for rubbers or bonnet she snatched her shawl from the sofa and threw it

over her head. "I'll be quick, grandma; don't be anxious, and don't try to get up, will you, please?"

"No, I'll keep still; go to the first house."

Opening the door with difficulty, the snow having drifted against it, she went out into the snow; her feet sank in the snow over the tops of her boots, but she soon discovered that it had blown into drifts and she might avoid the drifts. Reaching the front gate she looked up and down, through the thickly falling snow she could not discern the outlines of a single building. If it were nearer to go up the road or down the road she had no means of deciding; the wind would blow in her face if she went up the road, therefore she turned in the contrary direction that she might run more speedily. If the houses were back from the road she would certainly pass them; standing in the middle of the road she could not tell whether the fences were stone-walls or whether they might not be picket fences; in front of some houses she had noticed from the windows that the stone-walls ceased and picket fences began. If she walked close to the stone-wall, stretching out her hand now and then, she would know when she came in front of a picket fence or a gate. Her hurrying feet bore her along where her blinded eyes could not see the way; stretching out her hand once in a while, she ran on, stumbling often; it would grow lighter every moment, that was a comfort. A house could not be very far away; but suppose

she should pass it? By and by she must come to Walnut Grove or somewhere. If it were not so early she might meet some one. In "Snow Bound" didn't they turn out and break the roads?

*"Down the long hillside treading slow
We saw the half-buried oxen go."*

Oh, she must hurry! Grandma might die there all alone! How long the time must seem to her. Stone-walls, stone-walls! Stone-walls and snow! She plodded on and on.

Stretching out her hand again and again and yet again at last she touched a wooden gate; the gate stood partly open, she pushed her way through and ran up to the low porch. There was neither light nor sound within; it must be very early for no one to be astir; she lifted the latch, the door was fastened; she knocked and pounded with all her might, then cried aloud: "Let me in, let me in."

But neither voice nor footstep replied. She found another door and shook it and pounded upon it; the windows were almost above her head, but she managed to tap upon the lowest panes. All her efforts brought neither light nor voice. Almost disheartened she turned towards the gate; there was nothing to do but go on.

Out in the road again with a fainting heart, holding her shawl tightly with one bare hand, she ran on. After some distance, she put out her hand to find the wall and touched nothing; was

the wall broken down, or had she come to a turn in the road? Would it be better to cross the road and see what there was on the other side? If a voice would only speak now! Hark! that was something! There it was again! The distant tinkle of sleigh bells. She stood still to listen; they were coming nearer and nearer. She would not move, for if this were a turn in the road, they might pass her and go this way; she would stand still and call. Surely the bells were a voice. The tinkle of a sleigh bell would always mean something to her after this! Louder and clearer, nearer and nearer! Suppose they should not hear when she called? Stationing herself in the middle of the road, she dropped her shawl and lifted both hands over her head. A heavy sled drawn by two horses was approaching; a man was driving, a little boy sat beside him.

"Hallo!" shouted the man, "what's this? What's wanted?"

He could not stop the horses until they had passed her; she went to his side and clutched his arm. "Miss Jane Westlake is very sick and wants somebody to come; I came out for help," she cried, gasping.

"A little thing like you! Ain't you got a bonnet?"

"I dropped my shawl!"

"Sam, jump off and pick it up. Here, sis, give me your hand. Is it far?" he asked, as she climbed in beside him.

"I don't know; I think it is."

The little boy brought the shawl and the man threw it around her and over her head.

"It's lucky I came this way," said the man; "I didn't know why I did, either. What's the matter with her? Want a doctor?"

"I don't know what the matter is; she fell down in the woodshed, and I can't get her into the house. Will you go for a doctor, too?" she asked anxiously.

"Who is her doctor?"

"It would be better to go for the nearest one."

"That's Swanzey."

"Is it?" she cried eagerly, "then will you go to Mr. Ryle's parsonage and ask him to come, and will you stop at Mr. Morris's and tell John Gray that grandma is sick and wants to see him. I shall thank you very much."

"With pleasure, sis; do you live alone with her?"

"Yes, sir."

"You oughtn't to."

"I shall have to watch for the house; it's back from the street on high ground, a brick house, and the stone-wall is twice as high as the others are."

"I know the house; you have walked a mile; why didn't you stop at a house?"

"I did, but nobody lived there"

"Git up," cried the man, slapping the backs of the horses with the lines. "Is there a place for me to drive in?"

"I don't know; I've only been there a few days."

"Sam will hold the horses then. Git up, Jinny."

In a few moments they stopped at the front gate; the man sprang out, tossed the reins to the boy, and lifted Electa to the ground. She opened the door with a great dread, peering in with frightened eyes, but there was nothing to frighten her. Miss Westlake lay in the same position with her eyes closed, opening them slowly when Electa touched her.

"I've found somebody, grandma; he will carry you in."

"Put me in mother's bed," she said.

She could not stand steadily upon her feet; the man supported her up the steps, through the kitchen and sitting-room across the hall, and laid her upon the bed in the room that she and Electa had prepared.

"I'm very comfortable," she said, as Electa smoothed the pillow and laid the blankets over her.

"Put a brick to her feet, and give her something hot to drink," said the man; "now I'll go for the parson and the doctor."

"And John Gray," added Electa.

"Have you fed Lily?" asked Miss Westlake, opening her eyes.

"Will you feed the cow?" asked Electa; "I'll show you where she is. Now, grandma, don't be anxious, we'll do every thing."

With a sigh Miss Westlake, closed her eyes.

"I'm glad this room was ready," she said. "Lecty, send for Mr. Ryle and the lawyer."

It was nearly two hours before John Gray came; Miss Westlake smiled and said that she was glad to see him and asked him not to go away.

Electa had kindled a fire in the stove in "mother's room," opening the door into the sleeping-room. the sick room was comfortable and cosy; she had persuaded Miss Westlake to let her take off her dress and put on a night dress; she had taken off her shoes and laid a heated brick covered with flannel close to her feet, coaxed her to drink a cup of tea and taste a bit of dry toast. The fire was burning in the kitchen and on the hearth of the Franklin; the breakfast-table had not been set, the books were piled up on the table as she had left them last night. Electa went out leaving John Gray and Miss Westlake alone together.

"John Gray," she said solemnly.

"Well, grandma," he said cheerily. "Now, don't talk to me as if you were going to die. We can't spare you for a hundred years yet. Don't die and spoil all our good times."

"I may be helpless; I don't think that I shall die right away; my mother had three strokes—can you understand what I say?"

"Yes, but you do not speak distinctly."

"Be good to Electa, won't you?" she said very tenderly.

"I'll take care of her all my life," he said earnestly.

"I can trust you."

Out in the sitting-room in Miss Westlake's chair before the Franklin, Electa waited for the doctor and Mr. Ryle. Mr. Ryle came about noon. He kissed her, and kept her beside him while he talked to Miss Westlake.

"Get dinner for Mr. Ryle," said Miss Westlake; "get him a nice dinner, Lecty."

Electa was very glad to busy herself again; John had milked Lily and fed her and was taking care of the fires.

She went out, closing the door quickly lest she should catch some word about the will, lingering about the preparations for dinner and almost trembling as she returned to call Mr. Ryle to dinner. But they were silent as she opened the door; Miss Westlake appeared very much exhausted, and did not refuse the brandy that Electa held to her lips. If it were not for John Gray she could ask Mr. Ryle the question while they were at dinner.

"I'll stay with grandma," suggested John Gray, entering the sitting-room with an armful of wood; "give me a cup of tea for her, Electa."

She poured the tea and gave it to him after he had deposited the wood in the wood-box, then silently took Miss Westlake's place at the head of the table. Must she ask Mr. Ryle to ask a blessing? Very shyly she made the request and bowed her head. The blessing she prayed for was that she might have the courage to ask Mr. Ryle the dreaded question.

"You have been outside the gate," he said, passing her the biscuits.

"And I expect she was anxious enough, poor grandma."

"No; now that she feels herself so weak she has more trust in God; she rests in His strength as she did not do when she felt some strength in herself."

Electa opened her biscuit and buttered it.

"Mr. Ryle—I'll have to tell you now—I can't go on till I know the truth; last Monday I couldn't help overhearing what grandma said to you—a part of it—not about John Gray, but—about somebody else; if it were I she meant, I want to tell her that I *did* overhear, that I do know, and I don't want her to feel—"

"She did mean you; the house and land and one thousand dollars are to become yours."

She colored and let the biscuit fall from her fingers.

"But she doesn't want me to know, she thinks I will love her just for that," faltered Electa; "and I want to tell her before the lawyer comes this afternoon."

"Will it not excite her?" he asked.

"Will it? Oh, do you think it will? And can't I tell her at all? I don't want to be deceitful. I can't enjoy nursing her—I can't, I know I can't—if I am keeping a secret from her. I must tell her; can't I tell her quietly, or can't you persuade her to postpone making the will?"

"She will not consent to that."

"Then I must tell her," said Electa, decidedly.

"I think that I could tell her more quietly; I might tell her in a way not to excite her at all; will you entrust it to me?"

"You are very good to me," was all Electa could utter.

"Then be good to me by helping me eat this nice dinner; you haven't eaten a mouthful; this cold chicken is delicious and this pumpkin pie reminds me of the love of my boyhood."

"We made the pies yesterday, and had such a lovely time."

"I will tell her immediately; don't be anxious another moment."

"I can't believe that my trouble is over," sighed Electa; "it's so good I can't believe it. I can't eat, I'm too happy."

She was too happy to talk. Mr. Ryle said to himself as he looked at her subdued, chastened face that the girl was growing sweeter every hour.

John Gray came out with the brick in his hand and the cup and saucer on it.

"I have another hot brick," said Electa.

"I'll take it to her," said Mr. Ryle; "I'm a famous nurse."

"And I'll put it to her feet," said Electa, "and look at her, and then come out."

As she was moving towards the door to leave Miss Westlake's room, Mr. Ryle said in a low tone, "I'll call you in a few moments."

She would not wait outside the door; she seated

herself on the stairs and dropped her head in her hands. It was almost harder to bear this suspense than to go in and confess it herself. Would grandma send her away now when she needed her more than ever? Nan or Mollie might come and take her place, but they dreaded a sick-room, while she herself was a born nurse, every body said. She would be glad to go home; all she wanted in this world was to feel Celia's two arms around her. She had often told Celia that her presence alone was enough to make her happy. The door was opening;—no, he was moving within. He was talking earnestly, now he was still—was Cousin Jane speaking—was she sending her home?

"Electa," John Gray was calling from the sitting-room door, "what are you waiting there for?"

"I don't know—I've done the hard thing, and I'm waiting for the end."

At that instant Mr. Ryle opened the door.

"Electa," he said. The tone itself brought her the good news.

"Lecty, child," whispered Miss Westlake, "kiss me and don't fret any more."

Electa kissed her and did not fret any more. It was not a sentimental thing to do, but she went out into the sitting-room and ate a piece of pumpkin pie, a biscuit, a leg and a wing of the chicken, and a saucer of preserved plums.

The lawyer and the doctor called at the same hour; the lawyer's business was speedily settled; the doctor assured Electa that there was no imme-

diate danger, it was simply "a bilious attack," but he told Mr. Ryle that he would call again in the morning as the symptoms appeared serious. Mrs. Morris had promised to spend the night with them; a competent woman to undertake the house-keeping would be secured as soon as possible.

"Last night, only last night I was impatient with her because we couldn't study," thought Electa, sitting alone with her in the twilight.



XIII.

SOMETHING GOOD.

On Friday morning the physician announced that there was hope of Miss Westlake's recovery, if she were kept in perfect quiet. "She has been very much excited of late," he said. "You know how to obey orders, Miss Electa; you will be a good nurse."

Mrs. Morris remained until noon; Electa was alone with Miss Westlake for an hour and then her anxiety was relieved by the coming of a neighbor.

"I will stay to-night, and then if Mrs. Morris doesn't come back, somebody else will come; don't look so worried, dear."

"I don't mean to be worried," said Electa; "but she lies there so still and doesn't talk!"

Mr. Ryle called for a few moments late in the afternoon, he found Electa at the sitting-room window looking out into the snow.

"This is a lovely, white world," she said; "the tinkle of the bells comfort me every hour. It was snowing when I awoke this morning; I was glad to have it stop."

"I saw the doctor this morning, his report was hopeful."

"Oh, yes, if she is kept quiet; we scarcely speak in her room. How is Mrs. Ryle?"

"Doing well and full of sympathy for you all."

"Mr. Ryle!" He had drawn a chair to the Franklin and was sitting with his feet upon the hearth.

"Come to the sofa before you proceed."

The sofa cushion *was* restful; she leaned her elbows and hands upon it and tried to fashion her thought into words.

"How does the Spirit speak to us?"

"Just the way in which you, at that instant, most need to be spoken to."

"Then there are not any set phrases?"

"Often it is in the words of the Scriptures: He shall bring all things to our remembrance; He teaches us the meaning of the words uttered by God and by Christ."

"Then He doesn't speak just as you or Celia or papa would speak?"

"When He speaks through us to you, He speaks as we would speak; should He speak to you through John Gray, He might not use the words that He would use should He speak to you through Martin Luther or your father. In every truth that you receive He speaks to you, whether it be a truth you find in the Bible or in any other book, whether it is given to you from the pulpit or in ordinary conversation, or whether it come silently to your

spirit. Christ said that it was better for us that the Spirit should come to us than that He should remain in the world with us."

Electa was silent.

"Do you understand me?"

'I understand;—but I wanted to know if God does speak to me in real, human words."

"He speaks to you as you can understand; would he speak to you in Hebrew or Greek or Sanscrit? He speaks to you plain English words; to a German maiden He speaks in plain German words; he speaks to you about every thing that you need to be spoken to about; doesn't that cover all your needs?"

She still was puzzled.

"But how do I know it is God who is speaking; why may it not be my own naughty heart, or Satan?"

"You do not know God very well if you can not detect the difference. Christ says that His sheep know His voice; the voice of a stranger will they not follow. Before I entered, if you had heard a voice that sounded like my voice calling out in profane words, would you have said: Mr. Ryle is coming?"

"No, indeed."

"If you should hear a voice like your father's voice speaking cruelly and unkindly to Vail, would you say: 'That is papa talking to Vail?'"

"No; I should know better."

"Because you know your father and know that

would not be like him. When you hear a voice if it is like Christ and like God, whom else can it be but God the Spirit, speaking for them to you? Learn what God the Father is, learn what God the Son is, then you can never fail to recognize the voice of God the Spirit. You will surely hear His voice and know it, for Christ says: 'They shall hear My voice.' The words will be the words that you can best understand; if you were telling a story to Guy, you would not choose the words in which you would speak to your father. The Spirit speaks to you as a child. He chooses simple, easy words, the words in which you think. He chooses *your* words, as you would choose Guy's words. He speaks as a tender, loving, wise mother; you know that God is father and mother also; sometimes you need counsel, sometimes rebuke, sometimes encouragement, sometimes He speaks like father, sometimes like mother. There isn't any thing about which the Spirit will not speak to you; if you should fall asleep, and He wished grandma to have something done to relieve her, He would awaken you that you might do it. More than once I have asked Him to waken me at the right moment, when I felt that I needed sleep; perhaps He spoke to me, perhaps He touched me."

There was a soft, happy shining in Electa's eyes.

"The Spirit is nearer to you than Christ would be if He stood in this room, nearer than He would be unaccompanied by His Spirit within you; many that His hand touched when He was upon earth

were healed because He touched them, but they were not as near Him as you are this moment, if the Spirit be in your heart; one whom He healed wist not who it was that healed him, others did not care enough even to thank Him, and Judas, whose lips touched Him, was in that touch of the lips betraying Him."

She bowed her head upon the cushion and did not speak.

"You need never be alone, you need never live one moment in which He will not be with you; if you do not hear His voice at the instant you ask for it, it may be that your spirit is not still enough; He is making you still enough to listen, that very hush of your spirit before He speaks is the evidence of His presence with you."

She was very still now, listening to the voice of the Spirit through the words of Mr. Ryle,—human words, words just like her own.

"He moveth in us not only to *will*, but to *do* His good pleasure; that silent moving of His will upon your will is His influence; you could not leave your own will undone that you might do His will except it be that His power is upon you; you will to do, and you will not to do, because He changes your mind; you feel, you think, you will, you do God's will and good pleasure, because He moves you, sometimes in one way, sometimes in another, to feel, to think, to will, to do. God is ever speaking to us by His Spirit, by His word, by His providence."

She kept her head upon the cushion, not speaking; she remembered that hour as the hour in which she gave herself up wholly to the Spirit's keeping. John Gray was in the shed stamping the snow off his feet.

"I've brought her, Electa," he said, coming in. "Come in here, Mrs. Hope."

Electa arose to meet a middle-aged woman with a pleasant face and quietly efficient manner.

"Show her where to hang her bonnet and shawl," said John Gray, "and she's at home; you needn't tell her a thing."

Mr. Ryle went into Miss Westlake's room while Electa conferred with Mrs. Hope in the kitchen. Mr. Ryle turned back to say to Electa as he was passing through the kitchen: "I'll be in again Monday night, and perhaps I'll bring you something."

"Something delightful?" she asked eagerly.

"Something *very* delightful," he said laughing.

"I'll have it to look forward to," she said to herself. "Looking forward" was one of Electa's great pleasures. She went back to the sofa, curling herself up and resting head and hands upon the worn, red, sofa cushion.

"What are your cheeks so red about?" asked John Gray, coming to the Franklin and standing with his arms folded upon his breast.

"Ever so many things."

"Does your head ache?"

"I begin to understand that it has been aching a long time."

"I'll get you some lemons when I go to the mail. I have something to show you and something to tell you, which will you have first?"

"I'll take the bitter before the sweet."

"One is a secret."

"This twilight is just the time for confidences."

"The other all the village will know by Monday night."

"Has it any thing to do with what Mr. Ryle is to bring me?"

"I don't know what he is to bring you. You look pretty with rosy cheeks."

"Nobody ever said that before."

"Perhaps you never had rosy cheeks before. Guess what good thing has happened to me."

Electa started.

Did he know about the will?

"Is it an outside happening or an inside happening?"

"Both."

"Please don't keep me waiting."

"I was so surprised that it lifted me out of my boots. One day this week our school-master was taken sick; yesterday he was taken home, and what do you think the trustees have done? They have asked me to take the school for a month, and if I give satisfaction, wish me to teach all winter. How is that for splendid?"

"Oh, it *is* splendid!" she cried, sitting upright. "I knew you were 'called' to teach. Aren't you rather young, though?"

"How old am I, do you think?" he asked flushing crimson.

"Seventeen—almost."

"Eighteen—nearly. I call myself eighteen upon Christmas Day. I suppose you know I have no birthday and no name. I am nobody. I have nothing behind me. I have no claim to your notice, except this, the honor of Mr. Ryle's friendship."

"You have the claim of being yourself."

"John Gray! Who is John Gray?"

"He is the man that God created and Christ redeemed," said Electa, with the awe of the thought upon her. "How dare you say that you are nobody?"

After a long pause he said in a husky voice, "Thank you."

"Shall you begin Monday?"

"Monday morning."

"Are there many large boys and girls?"

"Several about my age."

"I am so very glad."

"Now you can not order me around; I shall not be your errand boy merely."

"You were not that—merely."

"Will you take me to board?"

"No, sir."

"Then I shall go away then."

"Go."

"You think that horses and oxen wouldn't draw me. Do you know what I promised grandma

yesterday? That I would take care of you—" he hesitated, he could not say, "all my life."

"Do you know how?"

"I can learn."

"Now what is the secret?"

"I'll show you that? Can you see it in the firelight?"

"I have eyes for a secret any time of day or night."

"Are you happy about that secret that troubled you?"

"Not happy, but relieved. It wasn't so bad as I feared; Mr. Ryle made it easy for me."

"You and Mr. Ryle seem to be great friends," he said, with the slightest protest in his voice.

"I am not the friend, he is. He is my hero."

"Perhaps you don't care to know my secret."

Electa could feel without understanding the change in his tone. Had she said any thing to hurt him?

"Perhaps you are not interested," he said trying to speak carelessly.

"In a secret? I am always interested in a secret."

"But not in *my* secret, perhaps."

"You want me to coax you; Mr. Gray, please tell me your secret," she said coaxingly.

"Now you are laughing at me."

He *was* hurt; in the twilight she could see the deep color in cheek and brow.

"I beg your pardon for acting so. I am fool-

ishly sensitive, but it is like showing you all my heart; it touches me as nothing else could; I am a stupid, blundering fellow, and I don't see what ever moved me to try. I am thoroughly ashamed of myself."

Under the kitchen table he had hidden a small, black valise; hastily he brought it to her, opened it and laid on her lap a pile of closely written manuscript; it was written in ink and only upon one side of the sheet. "My little pile of hard work," he said, tenderly smoothing with his hand the page upon the top of the pile; "I have worked nights for two years on this. There are a thousand pages of half foolscap here; twice I wrote it in pencil and twice I have written it in ink. It is a book for boys," his voice trembled, he spoke almost incoherently; she bent her head to catch his words; "it is for boys between ten and fourteen; the story of a boy between ten and fourteen, fatherless, motherless, sisterless, brotherless, the 'heir of all the ages.' Many of the experiences are real. I have written it out of my heart from love to boys and from love to the Lord, who was once a boy between ten and fourteen. No one knows it, not even Mr. Ryle. For two or three years I have written poems and sketches for papers. I suppose that encouraged me; I do feel very much ashamed to think I have dared."

Electa's wonder and awe were in her eyes; she was too much astonished to speak one word. She touched the manuscript reverently.

"Don't look at me so," he said, with a happy laugh; "I haven't written a book; this is only a manuscript, it may be a rejected manuscript."

"It is a treasure," she said, hugging it in both arms. "Mustn't I tell? Oh, I do want to tell."

"A secret is a thing to be kept."

"Then I won't tell. I'll go in and see grandma, and then light a candle and read. I'm very proud of your secret, Mr. Gray."

The shy, proud, luminous, gray eyes were something to see. It was worth while to live all his life to come to that moment.

Electa stepped softly across the hall and opened the door of the sick room. The odor of medicine, the candle placed where the light would not fall upon the pillow, the warning finger raised as she entered the room, stayed her steps and filled her with a new dread. She had not thought that grandma would die.

"She's quiet; be easy, don't speak loud; don't disturb her; she doesn't need any thing," whispered the owner of the finger in a loud, threatening whisper, rising suddenly and stepping heavily towards the bed.

Electa's face flushed indignantly, with a slight gesture she motioned her away and noiselessly approached the bed. Electa's footstep was as light as a snowflake; she bent and touched the helpless right hand with her warm, soft lips.

"Lecty! I'm very comfortable," said Miss Westlake in a weak voice; "don't fret about it."

"You look as sweet and pretty as a saint," said Electa lovingly.

"Is every thing all right?"

"Every thing is lovely."

"Does John feed Lily?"

"Yes, and milk her. I've made you some lovely beef tea; will you take it and grow strong?"

"Yes; you are very good to me. I've been thinking about that poor old woman left alone in the desert; I am not alone, I have my two children."

"You shall never be left alone, never. I am going to sleep in the rocker close to your bed, and John will sleep in the other room and keep the fire burning, and all you have to do is to go to sleep and get well."

"Tell me—tell me something to keep my mind on,—one thing to think about."

The warning finger was being upheld at her side, a loud whisper was close to her ear: "Don't stay too long."

Electa's lips touched the pretty, white hair on the old forehead; she said clearly:

" 'I'm a poor sinner and nothing at all,
But Jesus Christ is my all in all.' "

"That is good," murmured Miss Westlake in a refreshed voice.

Electa slipped out to bring the beef tea, leaving Mrs. Hancock, the neighbor, besieging Miss Westlake with questions. Bending over her she asked in a guttural whisper: "Are you warm enough?"

"Yes," was the quick reply.

"Don't you feel any air at all?"

"No."

"Don't you want to lie on your side?"

"No."

"Isn't your head too high?"

"No."

"Don't you think it is most time for your medicine?"

"I don't know," she answered uneasily.

"You took it out of the cup last time; you take it out of the tumbler this time; don't you remember?"

A frown gathered upon her forehead, she uttered a sound of impatience.

"Does Electa trouble you?"

"No, indeed; I want her all the time."

"Wouldn't you rather have me stay with you to-night?"

"No; I want her and John."

"They are very inexperienced; when my William Henry had a hemorrhage I sat up with him nineteen nights hand-running without taking my clothes off; that saved his life. Shall I lift you up to take your beef tea?"

"No."

"How are your feet?"

"Warm enough."

"Electa looks half sick; you ought to let her go to bed; she sat up half the night last night."

"She must go then; tell her."

As soon as Electa entered with the beef tea Mrs

Hancock hurriedly gave the message: "She says you *must* go to bed to-night."

"Yes, you must," Miss Westlake added firmly.

"I'll be comfortable, grandma; I'll sleep all the evening and come in at midnight." As soon as the words were spoken she regretted them; she must keep her word, and, oh, how she wanted to read John Gray's manuscript. But the promise could not be recalled; her eyes filled with disappointed tears.

Mrs. Hope set the tea-table without asking any questions. Electa almost felt as if she were the stranger instead of Mrs. Hope. John Gray came from the mail with the lemons and a lively letter from Nan. The letter, her headache, an increasing soreness in her throat, and her disappointment about reading the manuscript brought all the old homesickness back. She covered herself up on the lounge, her head away from the light.

"I suppose I must keep my word?" she said to John Gray questioningly; "but couldn't I rest while I read?"

"Did you promise to rest or sleep?"

"I promised to sleep."

"You may not be able to sleep, but you have no right to take any step to keep yourself awake. My book might put you to sleep."

She nestled her head resolutely in the cushion thinking over Nan's letter. The only bit of startling news was that Halstead Seymour had married Jennie Hood. "Poor Celia," she thought, "I

wonder what she finds to comfort her up in God's heart. Perhaps He will let something *very* good happen to her. Out in His world such dreadful things happen that if we couldn't look up in His heart, our hearts would break."

Did she think that of herself? Was the Spirit thinking it for her and speaking it to her? Words learned long ago came to her: "We know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that can not be uttered." Every prayer of hers that God granted, then, must be because the Spirit taught her to long for the thing and then to ask for it. Was it the Spirit that had moved her to want to do something for somebody? And what *was* she doing? Just now she was doing the hardest thing she could do; she was going to sleep for somebody.

"Electa!"

John Gray was awaking her gently. "It is half-past eleven; wake up and drink some more hot lemonade and then go in grandma's room. Mrs. Hancock came out to forbid me to awaken you, but I knew that you trusted me to do it."

Electa rubbed her sleepy eyes. What was the matter? Was Vail sick or Celia? And what had Halstead Seymour done?

"If you set the light where it will not disturb her, you might read the manuscript now, mightn't you?"

"So I might," she answered eagerly, fully awake;

"I dreamed that it was about somebody who was hanged. Because my throat hurts me, I suppose."

With many cautions and commands Mrs. Hancock left the sick-room, bidding Electa call her, "if there should be any change." After that Electa had no heart to open the manuscript. She moved the rocker to the side of the bed and sat with her eyes wide open upon the face asleep in the shadow. At two o'clock she was to give the medicine from the cup.

"Don't by any means make a mistake," explained Mrs. Hancock; "one is dark, the other light; one in a cup, one in a tumbler; one is covered with a book, the other with a piece of white paper; one is on the bureau, the other on the washstand; medicine is very powerful, you might hasten her death if you should make a mistake. At two the cup, at four the tumbler; at six the cup, at eight—but I shall be down before then; keep her feet warm, and don't talk to her, above all things. And call me if her finger-nails grow purple, or if her under jaw should fall."

Electa looked at her finger-nails every few moments; twice her lips moved; was the jaw falling? She thought of going upstairs and asking Mrs. Hope to come and sit with her, but that would be selfish; and John Gray was tired. She was lonely and Mrs. Hancock had frightened her; but she would be brave as long as she could; when her courage utterly failed she would speak to John.

There was not a sound within the silent house



until the clock in the sitting-room struck two. She had left the door of the sitting-room ajar that she might hear the striking of the clock. She arose slowly, half asleep, and staggered towards the bureau, filled the spoon from the tumbler, and placed it between Miss Westlake's lips.

"Lecty," she said, adding after a pause, in a whisper: "I'm a poor sinner—and nothing—nothing—"

As she turned she stood with the spoon uplifted. She had given the medicine from the tumbler, and Mrs. Hancock had said that at two o'clock it must be given from the cup. She had certainly said the cup! Replacing the spoon she dropped heavily into her chair. She had done the wrong thing; what could she do now but bear it? It could not hasten her death; how could it? The physician would not leave any medicine that would hasten her death; but it must make a difference, else he would not have been so urgent in his orders. What would the difference be? She must sit still two hours and watch for it. And how would she know which to give next time? Her throat was very sore and she was burning up with fever. If Celia's hand might only touch her head; if Celia could only give her something so that it would not hurt her so to swallow.

"Lecty!"

Electa was on her feet.

"I have such a pain—I can't catch my breath—under my left shoulder—"

The wrong medicine! Electa shook from head to feet. She could not speak.

"Make a mustard plaster, quick."

But she flew upstairs to awaken Mrs. Hope, gasping forth the whole story.

"It's pleurisy or something, I guess; I'll soon fix it," was the reassuring reply.

Electa could obey orders; she obeyed Mrs. Hope for the next two hours. At dawn the house was still again, and Electa went to sleep on the sitting-room sofa and slept as restfully as sore throat and fever would permit.

"I knew something would happen if I left her," exclaimed Mrs. Hancock, when awakened at eight o'clock.

Saturday and Sunday were two busy days. Mrs. Hancock went home Saturday noon, to Electa's great relief. Sunday afternoon Electa read John Gray's manuscript. She sat on the sofa wrapped in a blanket, with her throat bundled up in flannel, part of the manuscript in her lap and part slipping off the sofa cushion. John Gray stationed himself at the window with a volume of a Commentary, but his eyes were upon the absorbed reader's face oftener than upon the pages of his book.

"Did all these things happen to you?" she asked, lifting her eyes.

"To me or to some boy I know."

"They sound true."

"They are true; I had lived long years when I was fourteen."

"Do you know a mother like this?"

"She is my ideal of motherhood."

"Where do people get their ideals?" she asked as the thought came to her for the first time.

"Where do you get yours?"

Electa looked very grave. Mr. Ryle would say from the Holy Spirit. "This mother is no lovelier—nor so lovely, as my mother. Your ideal is not so lovely as the real.

"Of course not; the real is God's thought; the ideal is our thought of His thought; a glimpse of His thought that He gives to us."

Electa repeated the words: "A glimpse of His thought that He gives to us." Had John Gray grown old, or was she growing young? "Then you expect to find the real some day?"

"I certainly do,—in some form."

"Do you know any one as lovely as this girl Marion?"

"She is my ideal of girlhood."

"She is true and brave and straightforward, gentle enough, and taking. I don't know why she is so taking, either."

"Because she is content to be herself."

"She is like Celia and Robin and Nan. A combination of the three."

"I knew that she was somewhere."

She read until dusk. "It helps me," she said, piling it together. "I like people better."

Miss Westlake asked them to sing in the evening, and afterward John Gray read a chapter in

the Bible. "We are a family, we should have family prayer," suggested Miss Westlake. Electa and John knelt at the bedside; with her hand in Electa's Miss Westlake prayed. "I thank Thee that Thou hast set the solitary in a family," she began.

Electa opened her eyes Monday morning with the words: "I shall have it to-night. It must be something very good." The hope brightened all her day. In the afternoon Miss Westlake asked that she might sit up in bed; Electa made her comfortable with pillows, and brushed out her long hair, chatting about the small events of the days past as if they were wonderful happenings in the great world.

"John will have a story to tell to-night," said Miss Westlake.

"And I shall have something good; I hope it is something that I may share with you," said Electa.

The something was not brought until after supper. Electa was sitting at Miss Westlake's bedside, gently rubbing her right hand and talking about home when John Gray opened the door.

"Mr. Ryle has come," he said; "may he come in?"

"To be sure," returned Miss Westlake.

Electa turned quickly as he came in; he held no bundle in his hand; but for a certain lightness of step and a something in the grasp of his hand, she would have believed that he had a disappointment for her.

"I left it in the sitting-room," he said.

John Gray did not follow her. The door stood half open; before the Franklin stood a figure in a cloak that she knew, the black velvet bonnet with the cluster of crimson roses she surely knew, and the face as it turned—

"O, Celia," she cried, springing into her arms;
"O, Celia! Celia! Celia!"



XIV.

HER LESSONS.


"Now tell me all about it," cried Electa, almost dragging Celia down to the sofa; "don't stop to take off your things, that is, if you intend to take them off; I can't wait."

But Celia only laughed and freed herself.

"My letter didn't bring you? I didn't mean it to. I never thought of such a thing," said Electa, her tone gathering indignation at the mere supposition.

"No; you didn't! But somebody else did," said Celia, untying her bonnet-strings.

As Celia laid aside her cloak, Electa thought that she had grown sligher; she had not noticed it at home, but now, looking at her with the eyes of the separation, she noted a decided change: she was not the Celia of a year ago; her step was very light, her voice as clear as ever and sweeter, and her eyes—Electa could not at first, find a word for the change,—her eyes had become spiritualized. Some of the loving-kindness that Celia had found by looking up into God's heart was shining through her eyes.



How little Mr. Ryle's mother knew that when she was praying for a wife to be found meet for David that she was asking for hardness to be sent to Celia Given.

"Who else could?" questioned Electa, coming back from the contemplation of Celia's face. "Oh, was it Mr. Ryle?" a light flashing over her face as she remembered his promise about bringing her something Monday night.

"Mr. Ryle! No one else. His letter came with yours. He asked me to telegraph by what train he should meet me, and here I am. I had the letters after tea Saturday night."

Celia's practical voice was growing dreamy. She did not tell Electa what a wave of heart-sickness had well-nigh overwhelmed her that Saturday night; how she had left the others, and stolen away into the study to throw herself upon the lounge and give herself up to a grief that had not the relief of tears. "I must find somebody good on the earth or my heart will break," she had cried. The words were not in the form of a prayer, but they were in the heart of a prayer. "I want somebody that loves Jesus to love me," had been throbbing in her heart all day. At that very moment mamma was saying to papa: "Celia needs to be *out* somewhere; her world is too narrow," and while she was speaking Ned brought in the mail and Vail ran to find Celia with two letters in his hand.

"And here I am," Celia repeated, feeling as if she were coming again out of the dark study to

open her letters among the group in the dining-room at home.

"Did you come because you thought I was dreadful and dreary? Have I behaved so very badly? I did try so hard to be brave," said Electa, her voice choking as she hastily hid her face on her sister's shoulder.

"My little sister! My little, brave sister," Celia's arms tightened around her, "I came because you have borne enough and now it is my turn."

"There isn't any thing now to bear," laughed Electa, through quick-coming tears. "I just had time to catch my breath, and then it was all over. With you here there isn't any high wall, or shut-up rooms or rats. Oh, will you stay as long as I do?"

"Just as long as Cousin Jane will like to have me stay."

Electa laughed and clapped her hands; she almost cried "Oh, goody," as she used to do; she felt as if all her little-girl-hood had come back and nothing would ever trouble her again.

"Now I'll be happy forever after. I wonder—do you know, Celia, why God let my hard times be over so quick?"

"I think because you were so patient, so ready to obey, so ready to learn the lessons He was teaching you; He never keeps the 'hard times' one moment too long."

With her own words Celia was comforting herself.

"What does that red flannel mean around your neck? And that smell of—what is it?"

"It means a sore throat. Now tell me how every body at home looks?"

"I want to look at you a little while before I talk," said Celia, seating herself in Miss Westlake's chair and taking Electa into her arms.

Electa lifted her face and Celia kissed her eyes and lips. Such happy, dancing eyes! Such happy, tremulous lips!

"What do you see?" inquired Electa gravely.

"I see that you have learned your lessons."

"What is Vail doing?"

"All the old things and some new ones. The questions he *does* ask! He said to me yesterday, 'I don't see what Christ has to ask God to forgive our sins for; if He is just the same as God, why doesn't He forgive them Himself?'"

"What did you say?"

"I didn't know how to make him understand."

"Don't you think Mr. Ryle is splendid? *He* could make him understand. He has helped pull me through."

"Poor child! you look pulled through."

"Did you ever see any thing or any body just like Mr. Ryle?" asked Electa enthusiastically.

"Not just like him," admitted Celia.

"He has been my rock in a weary land," sighed Electa. But it was a happy sigh and Celia did not mind it.

"*Do* you like him, Celia?"

"He gave me a feeling of security."

"That's just it; he makes you feel so safe, just as if nothing would happen; and if it did, it might better happen than not. You don't know about Queen Isabel! She loved him, and then refused him because she wouldn't be a minister's wife, and then married an old, old man, very rich. His mother told me. How she is laying up things for 'David's wifel' Did he take you to see his mother?"

"Yes; I spent an hour in her room."

"Isn't *she* lovely?"

"Very lovely," said Celia, absent-mindedly.

"He is going away soon—he was going to call at The Beehive and I was intending to send those things I told you about; he is going to see some lady, I think. I think he has found 'David's wife.' But he said his mother hadn't seen her. Why, you shiver, Celia! Are you so chilly?"

"Yes, a little. No, I am not at all cold; I was only thinking."

She was "only thinking" that Mr. Ryle had said to her as he lifted her out of the carriage at the gate, "I was going to The Beehive to see you, Miss Celia; but now I need not go so far. I wanted my mother to see you."

"Don't you admire John Gray, too?"

"I certainly do," said Celia brightly, coming out of her reverie. "Haven't you found any one else for me to admire?"

"Grandma! Oh, she's as lovely as an old saint. I think she's like Elizabeth, the dear, old Elizabeth

who had a son in her old age; and she has taken John Gray. Will you go in to see her now? I suppose that Mr. Ryle has told her what he brought me."

They found Mr. Ryle arranging Miss Westlake's pillows and John Gray dropping twenty drops of medicine into a wine glass.

"See how I am served," said Miss Westlake.

"And now you have two hand-maidens," said Electa; "did *you* know she was coming, grandma?"

"Of course," said John Gray. "She told me last night."

"Lecty and I want you," said Miss Westlake; "will you stay?"

"Until you send me home," returned Celia.

"And grandma," Electa took the wine glass and exchanged it from one hand to the other several times before she found courage to add, "will you forget about the hundred dollars? I've been here such a little time, and now Celia is here I shan't be worth any thing; I haven't earned it and I shall not earn it now."

"Suppose I think that you have earned it already," replied Miss Westlake, the gleam of a smile in her eyes; "how will that do?"

"I know I haven't," said Electa decidedly.

"I know you have; you earned it that morning you went for somebody and you have earned it every day since. Mr. Ryle shall get it out of the bank for you, and then we'll say no more about money; it shall be a love-arrangement, and you and Celia shall stay as long as I want you."

"Will that be right?" asked Electa, appealing to Celia and Mr. Ryle.

"To be sure," hastily interposed Miss Westlake.

"Grandma can certainly make you a present, if she chooses," said Celia.

"It's my bargain, Lecty," said Miss Westlake; "I made the bargain in the first place."

"I thank you very, very much," said Electa, playing nervously with the wine glass. "I shall send it to papa for Trude. That's all I wanted it for."

"I must learn to sign my name with my left hand, I suppose," sighed Miss Westlake. "I couldn't put Patty to sleep with this hand now."

"Mr. Ryle," Electa turned to him suddenly. "Will you take the money and the other things when you go?"

"Go where?" he asked confusedly.

"I don't know," said Electa innocently. "But you said you were going somewhere on business."

"My business can wait," he said, laughing a little and glancing at Celia. But Celia was tying Miss Westlake's cap-strings and would not look at him.

It touched Electa to see John Gray and Mr. Ryle turn and listen whenever Celia spoke—her beautiful, homely Celia. She wondered if "David's wife" could be lovelier than Celia; it was wrong, perhaps, to choose when Mr. Ryle had already chosen, but she did wish that he had chosen Celia. Then there would be two to be the shadow of a rock in their people's weary land.

In all their talk of home that night Celia did not once allude to Halstead Seymour. Electa always remembered the cheery, busy days that followed the dreadful, dreary days. Awaking in the morning to find Celia was a new pleasure every morning, and the good-night talk was a new pleasure every night. And all through the day there was work and study, and letter-writing, and looking forward to John Gray at night, and looking forward to Mr. Ryle at least twice, and often three times during the week. There were sleigh rides and going to church, long visits to Mrs. Ryle with staying over Sunday to hear Mr. Ryle preach; there were all the pleasant days and nights in grandma's room, and there were the letters from home, and from the boys and from Robin and Trude. Trude said that she didn't know why Electa should be so good to her; it must be because she was such a bad, thankless creature that she couldn't live without somebody being good to her. Robin's letters were sweet and fresh; she was as happy as a robin in spring-time.

"Cousin Jennie says that you shall come next winter," she wrote to Electa, "because this winter is so doleful to you."

"Doleful!" repeated Electa, indignantly. "I wouldn't exchange places with her for any thing."

Miss Westlake regained strength slowly; not until Christmas Eve did she cross the hall and take tea with them in the sitting-room, and then she leaned upon John Gray in her tour through the

kitchen, and while she ate, the spoon trembled in her poor right hand.

"I am as happy as a queen to-night," she said, looking around the table; "no, I am happier than any queen, unless that queen is a mother among her children. I *hope* Queen Victoria is as happy as I am."

That Christmas Eve was an era in more lives than one; John Gray and Miss Westlake had a long talk in Miss Westlake's sitting-room; it ended in John Gray's kissing her hand reverently and lovingly, and promising to write his name John Gray Westlake for evermore. Electa was admitted, after a while, and to her surprise and very great joy, was bidden to remember that John Gray was her cousin and a Westlake.

"I'm grandma's Christmas present!" exclaimed John Gray. "She asked me to give her John Gray, and as I had nothing better to give, how could I refuse?"

Before the Franklin, Celia sitting in Miss Westlake's rocker and Mr. Ryle standing beside her, two others were giving and receiving a Christmas gift.

"I don't deserve you," said Celia, humbly.

"Ditto," laughed Mr. Ryle; "we'll go on not deserving each other forever. To-morrow I want to give you to my mother."

Celia told Electa that night as they held their usual good-night talk, each sitting on the rug before the Franklin.

"I'm dreadfully surprised," said Electa mischievously. "John Gray and I couldn't imagine what you and Mr. Ryle have been finding to talk about all these afternoons and evenings."

Mrs. Ryle said to Electa, "I've found David's wife at last, and she's lovelier and nearer to me than I knew how to dream. I tell him—and I told her, too—that I got them for each other out of God's heart."

When Electa repeated this to Miss Westlake she said: "That's where I got John Gray."

John Gray Westlake taught school at Walnut Grove through the winter, studying as well as teaching, and reciting three times a week to Mr. Ryle. Electa studied with him, remembering that she was "called," also, to teach children. She could not believe that she was the same forlorn maiden who had stood on the piazza that night in the rain, "the little girl who came in the storm," for she was learning to love to be "out in the world." She was even learning to love strangers; she was forgetting that she was lame; she was becoming so interested in people and things that her voice no longer kept down her throat when she was introduced to a stranger; she could think of something to say; and she was not afraid to say it; some one remarked to Celia one day, "How graceful and lady-like your sister is!" and Electa laid it up to comfort herself with. No one ever called her "gawky" and "poky" again. To be associated with Mr. Ryle and John Gray was bet-

ter than a college course to Electa without them. They had taught her what a happy thing it was to live in God's world, among the people He had made to be her own kin.

One thing that Mr. Ryle said she kept in continual remembrance: "God put you on the earth and keeps you here because He needs you to do His will here; without you, His will would not be done as He seeks to have it done, therefore He *needs* you that His plan may be perfect; without your life a link in His purposes and plans would be missing, and if you always choose to do His will you will help make His plan for yourself and all others perfect—He needs even little Electa Given down here on earth—if He hadn't needed you He never would have thought of making you."

Mr. Ryle advised John Gray to lay his manuscript aside until he had finished his college course; Electa was sorely disappointed, but her good sense accepted Mr. Ryle's judgment. John Gray Westlake never became famous, but he wrote more than one book that helped to mould manly character. Before Mrs. Ryle was called home she had the happiness of being waited upon two years by David's wife.

"David's wife, you've been good to me," were the last words she spoke to her.

Miss Westlake lived to see John Gray and Electa married; papa and Mr. Ryle married them in Miss Westlake's parlor; Electa's mother and all her brothers and sisters were there as "bridesmaids."

A houseful of people ceased to be a terror to Miss Westlake; and, indeed, how could it be otherwise, as long as John Gray and Electa loved "people more than any thing or any body out in the world.

With Celia so near and all the others coming constantly Electa had her heart's desire, for the old house was as full of sunshine and as full of children as it could hold. John Gray and Electa taught them all that God's providence was their happiest inheritance, and that they must first look up into God's heart and then go bravely out into the world.









